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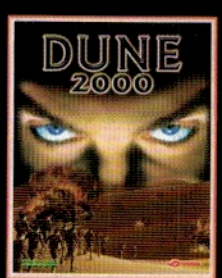

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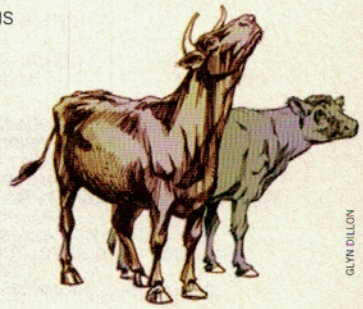

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EDITORIAL

OCTOBER 1998 No 115

LISA ANDERS

CORN FED

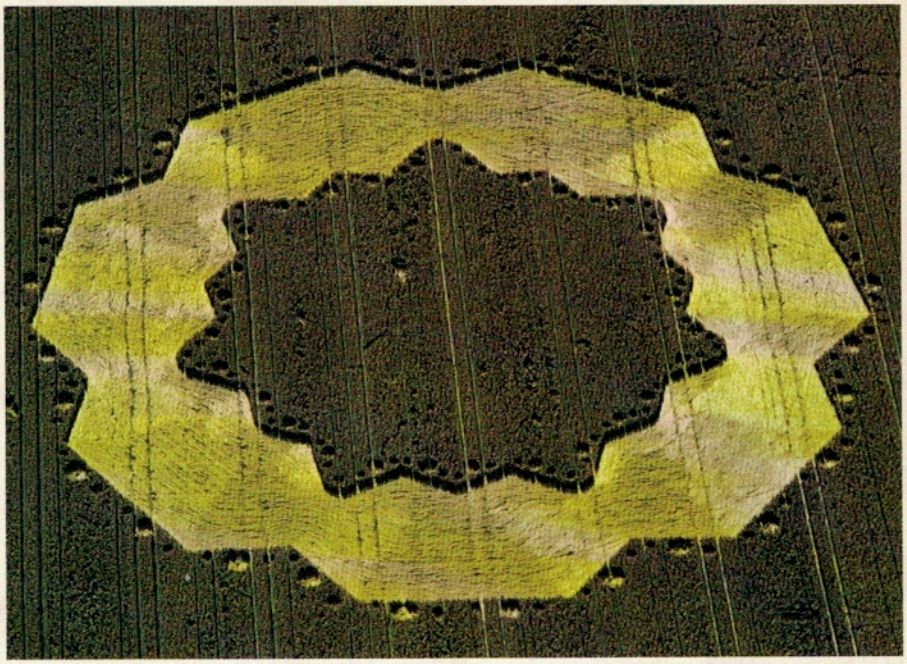
A decade after their first appearances, crop circles are still with us; bigger and more complex than ever and still causing bafflement and delight, like this magnificent formation (below) made at Taws Mead Copse on the weekend of 8-9 August. They are strangely powerful images – whatever their origin – and big-budget advertising agencies now think nothing of hiring teams of 'makers' to make specials. In deploring this the New Agers – who believe the glyphs are sacred communications – are themselves not above exploiting the latest designs in their commercial ventures. Perhaps the biggest puzzle of all is the identity and motivation of the 'makers'; those who know, or claim to know, are keeping quiet. *FT* will find out one day and tell you.

In the meantime, this has focused our attention on the need for more investigative reporting and we are pleased to announce the first of a regular series by Mark Pilkington – see 'Fortean Bureau of Investigation' on page 24 – who reports, inevitably, from ground zero in crop circle country.

John Billingsley's investigation of the 'Hummadruz' – a humming, buzzing, droning sound of mysterious origin noticed in parts of Britain for decades – also touches on crop circles as there have been accounts of odd sounds (like vibrations or "chattering birds") heard or felt at their centres – see page 28.

Now that the Roswell 'crash' is disintegrating before our eyes, there is a noticeable attempt to elevate the Aurora, Texas, incident of November 1896 to a pre-Roswell UFO crash status. As Jeff Gorvetzian reports, we might never know, finally, what hit Judge Proctor's windmill or the identity of the 'alien pilot' believed to be buried in the graveyard at Aurora... but it's a great tale and you can help restore its central monument – see page 34.

Paul Sieveking



STEPHEN ALEXANDER

FEATURE WRITERS THIS ISSUE

JOHN BILLINGSLEY

John Billingsley is a freelance writer based in Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire. He is also Editor of Northern Earth, the magazine of the Northern Earth Mysteries Group, published quarterly (http://easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~pato/ne/).

JEFF GORVETZIAN

Jeff Gorvetzian is a freelance writer living in Austin, Texas. As Fringeware Ambassador and head of the Aurora Marker Project, he has led negotiations in Aurora, Texas and elsewhere which should help avert interstellar war and lead to a swift resolution of the current crisis. This is his first article for the *Fortean Times*.

GEOFFREY ABBOTT

Geoffrey Abbott is a retired Yeoman Warder of the Tower of London and Member of the Queen's Bodyguard of the Yeomen of the Guard Extraordinary. He is the author of several books on the Tower, the latest being *Mysteries of the Tower of London* (Hendon Publishing Co, Hendon Mill, Nelson, Lancs BB9 8AD, £4.99).

PATRICK HUYGHE

Patrick Huyghe has followed the parapsychology scene for over 20 years but doesn't seem to have the faintest trace of ESP. Despite that handicap, he is the co-editor of *The Anomalist*, the very successful fortean journal published in the United States. His lastest book is *The Field Guide to Extraterrestrials*.

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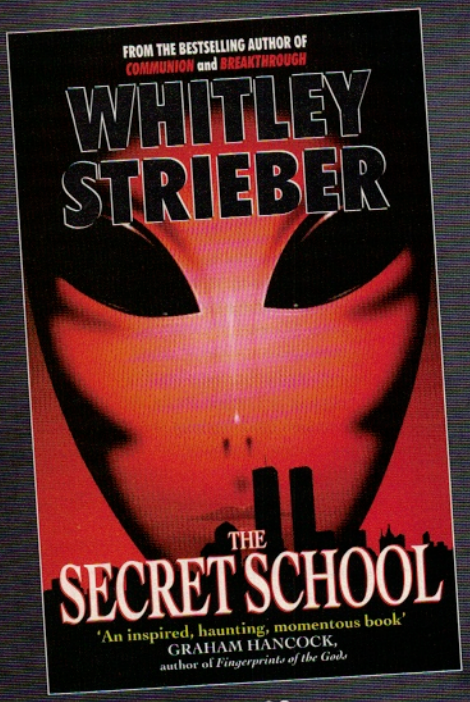

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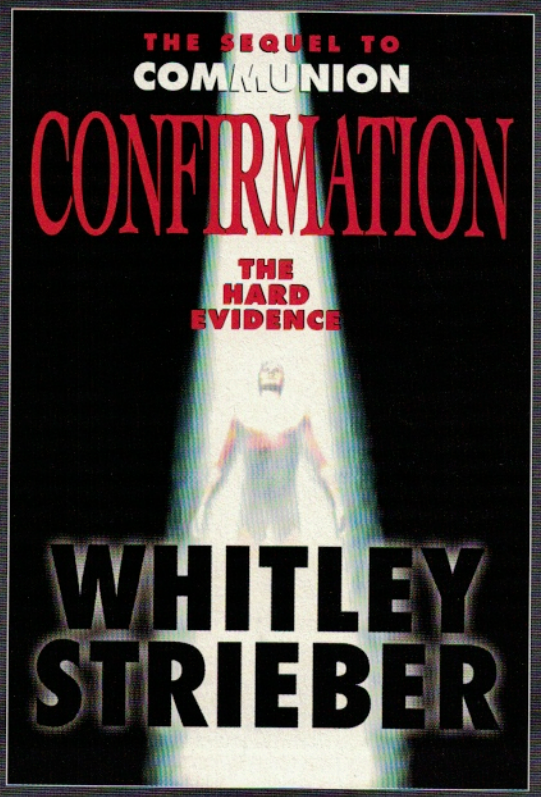

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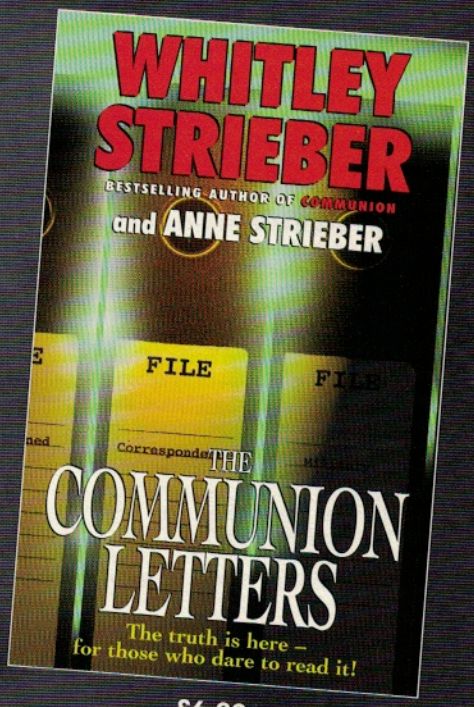

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FISH OUT OF WATER: Chen Yiyu, vice-president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, discovered a fish in a water pit near the Number 4 Tazhong Oilfield in the remote Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region – an area where aquatic life was believed not to be viable. The pit had been carved out with bulldozers during a highway construction project, and it eventually filled with ground water. The black, fresh-water fish had adapted to the slightly saline water in the pit.

Chen has ruled out the possibility that the fish was brought to the desert by people working there. *Earthweek in Victoria (BC) Times-Colonist, 19 July 1998.*

GOLDEN SHOWER: Bill Allen was cleaning out his rainwater butt and something flipped in the bottom. It was half a dozen goldfish. Since the butt was standing against the back door of the house, catching the water from the roof, Mr Allen could only assume that the goldfish had fallen from the sky. *Angling Times, 10 June 1998.*

BYE BYE BABY: The Vietnamese girl born with two heads on 22 June [FT114:8] died on 20 July. *Middlesbrough Eve. Gazette, 20 July 1998.*

POTENT PENSIONER: Roberta Burke, 63, went to court in New York on 2 June seeking $2 million plus damages after her 70-year-old millionaire lover dumped her for a younger woman two days after making love to her on 3 May with the assistance of the anti-impotence pill, Viagra. Frank Bernardo had lived with Ms Burke since 1988, but became impotent in 1994. "It's time for me to be a stud again," he told her. *D.Telegraph, 3 May; [R] 3 June 1998.*

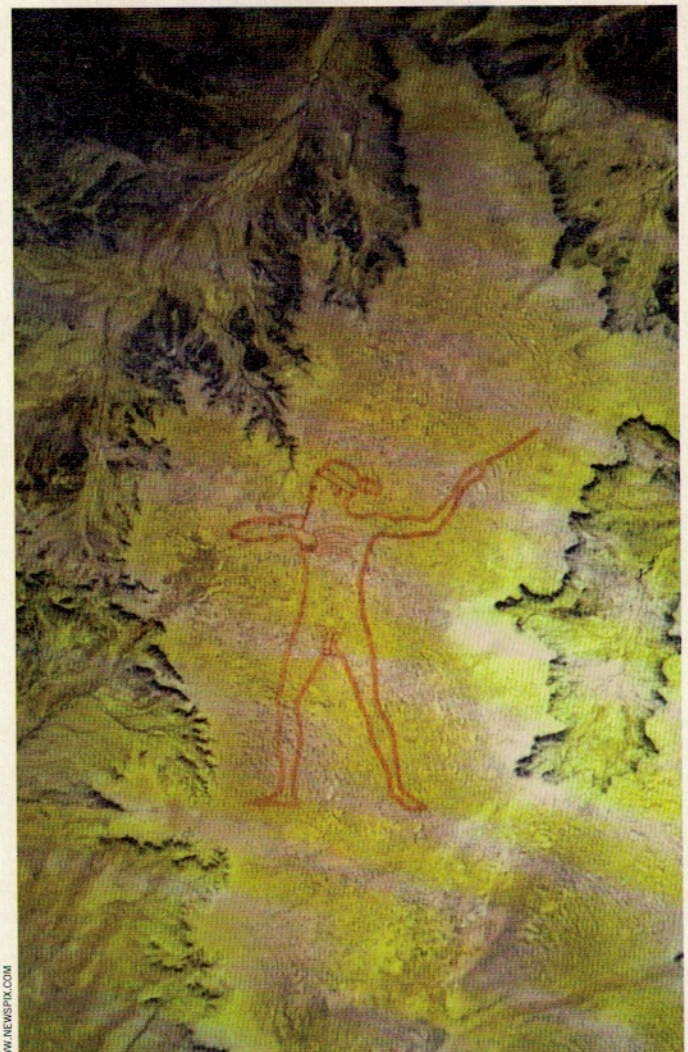
TERROR BEAR'S PICNIC: The inhabitants of the Transylvanian village of Ponor are terrified of a giant bear. The beast attacked an ox weighing 600kg (1,323lb), sucked out its blood and ate its internal organs. "Dracula would be proud of this bear," said an old peasant. *Evenimentul zilei (Romania), 9 June 1998.*

WHALE OF A TALE: On 1 June, the whaling boat *Bolga* off Norway's northern tip harpooned a minke whale. The wounded mammal rammed the 53ft (16m)-long wooden boat and snapped the boat's 26ft (8m) mast, sending two crewmen from the crow's nest into the icy waters, about 425 miles (684km) north of the Arctic Circle.

Benn Viggo Nilson was unhurt, but Bjoern Johansen had cracked ribs. The damaged boat had to withdraw from the whale hunt and the prey escaped. Minke whales can grow up to 30ft (9m) in length. *[AP] D.Mail, 3 June 1998.*

BOWLED OVER: A magpie delayed a cricket match in Rye on the Isle of Wight when it swooped down and stole the keys from the ignition of a motorised roller that was about to prepare the pitch. A tractor had to be summoned to tow the roller away. *Times, 3 June 1998.*

the new wizard of Aus



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SEEING THE BIG PICTURE: Who created Marree Man in the Australian desert?

SOMETIME IN JUNE, the figure of a naked aborigine hunter, 17 miles (27km) in circumference and 2 miles (4km) tall, appeared in the South Australian desert near Finnis Springs, south of Lake Eyre. The figure, presumably made by a plough, was discovered from the air in mid-July after anonymous faxes to the hotel and local paper in the outback settlement of Marree (population 60), about 37 miles (60km) to the south-east. The faxes proclaimed it the "the world's biggest work of art" – five times the size of the largest drawing on the Nazca Plain in Peru. In fact, Marree Man (otherwise known as Stuart's Giant) had been photographed three weeks earlier by NASA's Landsat satellite on 28 June.

One fax extolled the potential tourism benefits and said that the plateau was chosen because of the white chalk 6in (15cm) below the brown soil. If the soil was scraped away from the ploughed areas, it stated, "a dramatic white figure of considerably greater visibility will be created". The plateau is subject to several overlapping Aboriginal land claims and is close to sites of importance to local tribes. Currently, Aboriginal land claims are under heavy attack with the federal Government succeeding in turning back the more liberal climate of negotiation which has prevailed until recently.

Anthropologists in Adelaide said the drawing showed a central Australian, possibly from around Alice Springs and copied from a turn-of-the-century photograph. The carving had been pegged out every 6 miles (10km), maybe with the use of a backpack-operated differential global positioning system. The lines were apparently made by four passes of a plough and were 105ft (32m) across in places. It was calculated that the drawing had required 280 miles (450km) of ploughing.

Oddly, there were no big tyre marks to suggest the use of a tractor or heavy loader and no residents admitted hearing or seeing anything out of the ordinary. A small pit had been dug, containing what appeared to be a satellite photograph of the figure, an American flag in a bottle and a note referring to the Branch Davidian cult, 80 of whose members were wiped out in a botched FBI raid in Waco, Texas, in 1993.

A few days later it was discovered that official military records placed a group of army engineers, surveyors and a convoy of earth-moving equipment in the region at the time the giant figure was first seen. The 17 Construction Group team had been constructing roads and an airstrip in South Australia's Oak Valley for the local Aboriginal community since late April. During June, the Sydney-based team of between 50 and 70 men were moving slowly in small units towards Alice Springs via Port Augusta and Coober Pedy. An army spokesman said he was not aware of the troops travelling so close to the site of the figure or being responsible for the mystery carving.

A number of military vehicles were seen on 1 June by Peter Flavel, on holiday with his wife Heather. The couple – from Cowell in South Australia – were travelling along the Oodnadatta Track when they pulled off the road to make way. "There were three army vehicles, including a light 4WD-type vehicle, a loader with a dozer on the back, and another small vehicle carrying fuel and odds and ends," Mr Flavel said. "The army's always doing exercises in the region, but I thought it was strange such a small unit was apparently in the area for roadworks." Army logs showed there were no South Australian military personnel in the region at that time, but they may have been the New South Wales unit. It is unlikely the anonymous artists will ever be caught. A preliminary investigation by SA's Department of Environment, Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs and the state police has found no crime was committed. Authorities have recommended no action be taken. *[AFP,AP,R] 15 July; Times, D.Telegraph, 16 July; The Northern Star, 16 July; Herald Sun (Victoria, Australia), 20+22+23 July 1998.*

For another mysterious giant drawing – this time from the Alword Desert in Oregon, USA – see page 16 of this issue.

THIS JUST IN

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LUCKY FOR SOME?
An Open University team has found the necessary chemical signatures in a meteorite to identify it as being from Mars. The grapefruit-sized lump of rock is only the 13th out of 20,000 hopefuls to be positively labelled as Martian produce, and has been dubbed Lucky 13.

Team leader Professor Colin Pillinger says the meteorite could be anything from one million to 4.5 billion years old and would have been blasted from the planet by a comet or asteroid strike. Since then, it has probably been knocking around the Sahara Desert for over 40,000 years before being discovered by persons as yet unknown.

The OU team are currently studying it for any microscopic signs of life, though they remain wary of letting hype overwhelm science. Controversy still rages over NASA's 1996 announcement of apparent life on the meteorite ALH84001, discovered in Antarctica in 1994. *CNN, New Scientist, D. Telegraph, 11 August 1998.*

RENAISSANCE CYBERMAN
The stainless steel offspring of Leonardo Da Vinci may soon pave the way for human inhabitants on Mars. Called an anthrobot, the £2 million NASA humanoid has fully articulated joints in its spine, chest, elbows, wrists and hands, and electric linear-motor muscles.

Although the technology may have advanced somewhat, designer Mark Rosheim was directly inspired by Leonardo's 15th century designs for an arm-waving robotic knight.

Some believe Leonardo actually built a prototype model before starting work on *The Last Supper* in about 1495. *D. Telegraph, 12 August 1998.*

MEMORIAL SERVICE
There will be a memorial service for Ralph Noyes at 2:30 pm on 19 November at St James' Church, Piccadilly, London. It has been organised by Montague Keen and all are welcome.

Ralph, who died in May aged 75, was well respected for his research and writings on ufology, crop circles and psychical research.

An obituary will appear in *FT* later.

brothers in arms

CONFORMING TO A PATTERN often seen among twins, Reece and Drew Saunderson from Barnoldby-le-Beck near Grimsby in Humberside broke their arms in exactly the same place five weeks apart. One week after Reece, two, had his plaster removed, his younger brother tripped and exhibited the same fracture. Both accidents happened in the garden of their home in Church Lane. Another time, Reece scratched himself in the eye with a nail. "He didn't cry," said his mother Lisa, "but the second he did it, Drew started to cry". *Grimsby Eve. Telegraph, 20 June 1997.*

LISA WARRENER/GRIMSBY EVENING TELEGRAPH

sidelines

STORMY SAVIOUR: Twenty-four members of a Pentecostal congregation left their homes to live in their Jamaican church – to avoid an apocalyptic flood. Their pastor said God planned to punish Jamaicans for their sins and that only the church would survive. *Middlesbrough Eve. Gazette, 26 May 1998.*

SIGHTSEEING TOUR: Thousands of visitors descended on the Chinese seaside resort of Penglai, where two mirages had been sighted within two weeks. Scenes of mountains, lakes, buildings and streets with cars and pedestrians had appeared in the sea near the resort, long famous for its mirages. "Penglai Fairyland" has drawn crowds for 1,000 years, but 50,000 came in June. *[AP] 22 July 1998.*

MARCHING ORDERS: Cadet Tristan Gooley, an Old Etonian, spoke of his "deep regret" at the embarrassment he caused Sandhurst by marching naked across the parade ground on 5 May, in step with other members of his training platoon. Gooley, 24, was desperate to leave and thought the stunt would bring about the quickest exit possible – which it did. A furious sergeant major dragged him from the parade ground after he entered from his barracks. *D.Telegraph, 29 May, 1 June 1998.*

BOXING CLEVER: Elderly people in eastern Ukraine who have not received pension payments for five months were offered free coffins as an alternative. Earlier that month, the country's pension arrears stood at £500 million. *[AFP] 24 June 1998.*

BACK TO HIS ROOTS: John Johnson, 69, from Pembina, North Dakota, got lost in dense woods near the Canadian border while gathering logs with his son-in-law. For eight days, he survived by eating lily pad roots before a couple driving by found him on 23 May. He was said to be in a stable condition in hospital. *South China Morning Post, 25 May 1998.*

CYGNET OF THE TIMES: The mild weather brought about by El Niño has helped one of the 1,000 swans at Abbotsbury Swannery, Weymouth, Dorset, make history. The bird is the mother of the earliest cygnet to be born there for 600 years. *Western Mail, 2 May 1998.*

POWER MEOWTAGE: On 11 April, an inquisitive cat plunged the main commercial sector of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, into darkness for two hours. It had wandered into the control room of a power station, stepped on a wire and created a short circuit. The power was restored only when the charred remains of the cat were removed and the switchgear cleaned. *[AP] 13 April 1998.*

LOW BLOW: A pilot was expelled from his aviation club for flying his glider so low it sliced the ear off a grazing horse during a competition in the Dutch town of Ommen. The animal was recovering, but the prognosis was not good. *Western Mail, 25 June 1998.*

sidelines

SILLY GOOSE: David Tester, a retired policeman, shot a goose in panic when it swooped towards him as he stalked a flock of wood-pigeon near his home in Ongar, Essex. He was knocked out cold as the goose brained him. His 12-bore double-barrelled shotgun went off again as he fell, shooting him in the left foot. He only realised what had happened when he came to and saw the dead goose lying beside him. *Sun, 10 June 1998.*

DATE WITH DESTINY: Brazil won the World Cup in 1970 and 1994; 1,970 +1,994=3,964. Argentina won it in 1978 and 1986; 1,978+1,986=3,964. Germany won it in 1974 and 1990; 1,974+1,990 =3,964. England won it in 1966; 3,964-1966=1998... but England didn't win in 1998, so bang goes another numerological pattern. *Mirror, 30 June 1998.*

THE DOC'S BOLLOCKS: Frodo, a Chinese pug aged 16 months, living in San Lorenzo, California, has received the world's first set of canine testicular implants made of solid silicone. He was neutered and surgically implanted with CTI Corp's Neuticles Naturals. "He never knew he lost anything," said Frodo's owner Janell Sausser. CTI said 14,560 pairs of its less expensive, hard polypropylene Neuticles had been implanted in dogs and cats in the past three years, but the new, softer silicone version of Neuticles is more authentic. *[R] 14 July 1998.*

FIRST CHURCH: American archæologists excavating near Aqaba in southern Jordan have found what they believe is the oldest remaining Christian church in the world. The mud-brick monument, close to the Red Sea, may have been built by the Christian community of Ayla. "We think the church was built in the late third century and if that date holds true it would be older than the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem or the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem," said Thomas Parker, one of the archæologists. *[R] 9 July 1998.*

beside himself

PAGE ONE

WHEN FRANK HAYNES (left), 56, of Leicestershire, visited a restaurant during a trip to Paris he met his spitting image, Jean-Pierre Montaron (right). Both men had the same spectacles, jovial round face, wavy hair and pepper-and-salt beard. In conversation they discovered they were both artists and had identical mannerisms.

Since the chance meeting in February 1997, the two men have become good friends. They have visited each other's homes and M. Montaron, 41, who lives in the Paris suburb of Seine Saint Denis, has exhibited his work at the gallery owned by Mr Haynes. "Frank and I get on so well that I consider him to be a brother," he said. *D.Mail, 2 Feb 1998.*

polar opposites

A LOST TRIBE of dark-skinned Eskimo hunters have been discovered living at the edge of the polar icefields. They are descendants of Matthew Henson, a former Washington hat shop assistant and the first black man to reach the North Pole as part of Robert Peary's 1909 expedition. While Peary became a rear admiral, Henson worked as a railway porter, janitor and messenger. He died in 1955, aged 88. He had a talent for dog-sledge driving and was selected for the final push to the pole ahead of five white men in Peary's team; but contemporary accounts relegated his role to that of a valet. The mixed-race Eskimos still live close to the landing sites used by Peary's ship, the *Roosevelt*. Peary also had children by his Eskimo lovers and it is thought that other polar explorers left children behind.

Both Peary and Henson installed Eskimo mistresses, Alequasina and Aqattanntuau, in their ship during an earlier expedition in 1905. The women gave birth within days of each other in the ship's boiler room. Henson returned to see his son, Anaukaq, on the 1909 expedition. After they reached the pole on 6 April 1909, Peary and Henson never saw their children again. However, Henson sent presents to his son in the baggage of later expeditions. Separated by thousands of miles, Henson and Aqattanntuau resumed their previous lives. She married an Eskimo man and her son by Henson in turn had five sons, who still survive.

Debbie Allen, the Hollywood producer of *Amistad*, Steven Spielberg's film about slavery, who hopes to make a film about Henson, believes his Afro-American genes may have saved the dangerously inbred tribe. *Sunday Times, 26 April 1998.*

CORBIS

THE ICEMAN COMETH: Polar explorer Matthew Henson.

motor home

A STORK PERCHES on an old East German Trabant put up to support a nest by pensioner Arthur Jaensch at Neuruppin, north of Berlin. *Newcastle Journal, 15 April 1998.* PHOTO:AP

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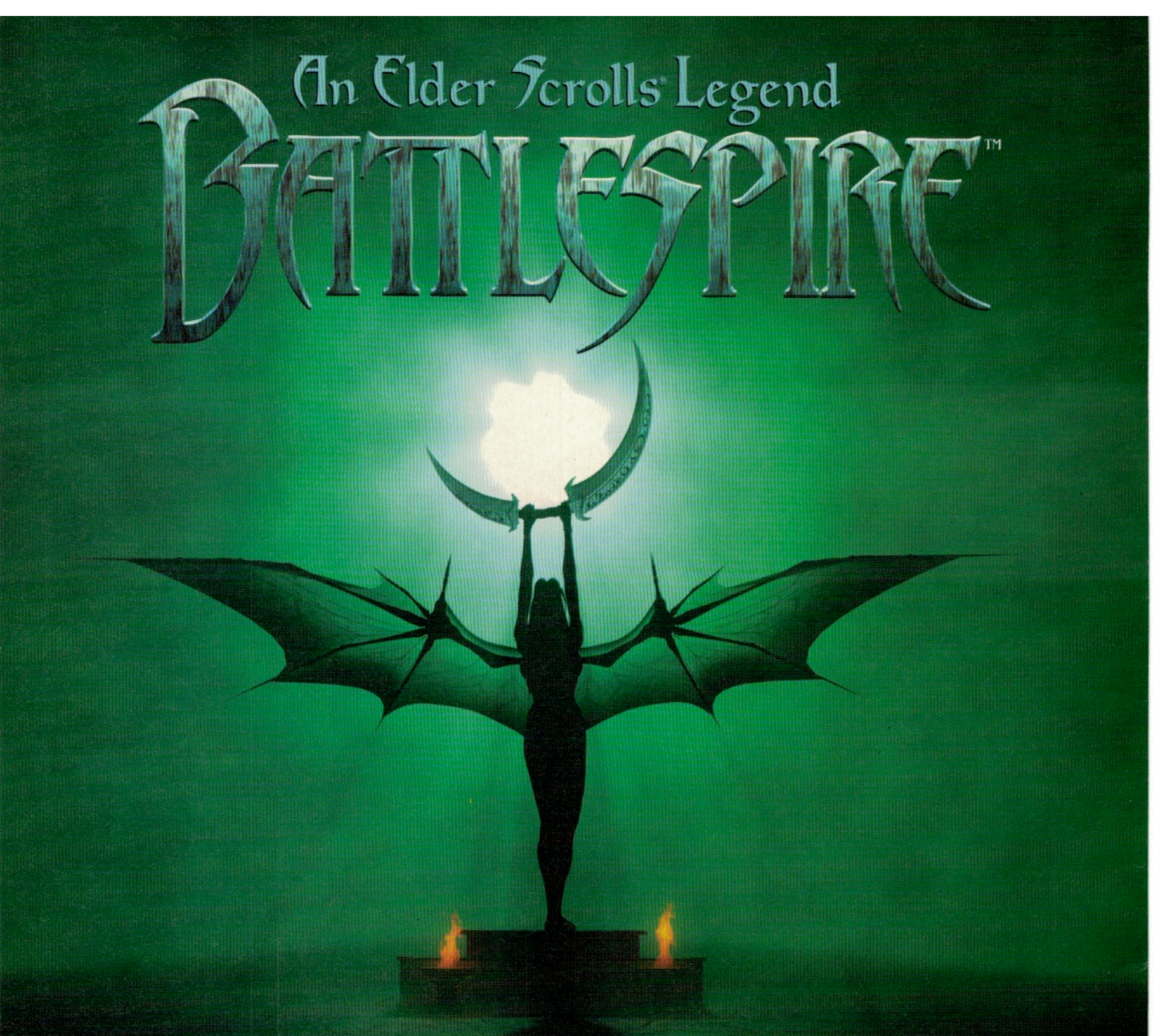

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in the hair tonight

FABRICE

AN ALABAMA BARBER has come up with a brilliant new use for human hair. Phillip McCrory was watching TV coverage of the 1989 Alaska oil spill including the rescue of an otter. Its fur was saturated with oil and he wondered if human hair would trap it in the same way. He stuffed 5lb (142g) of hair from his salon into a pair of tights, filled his son's paddling pool with water, added motor oil and found that the oil was absorbed very effectively.

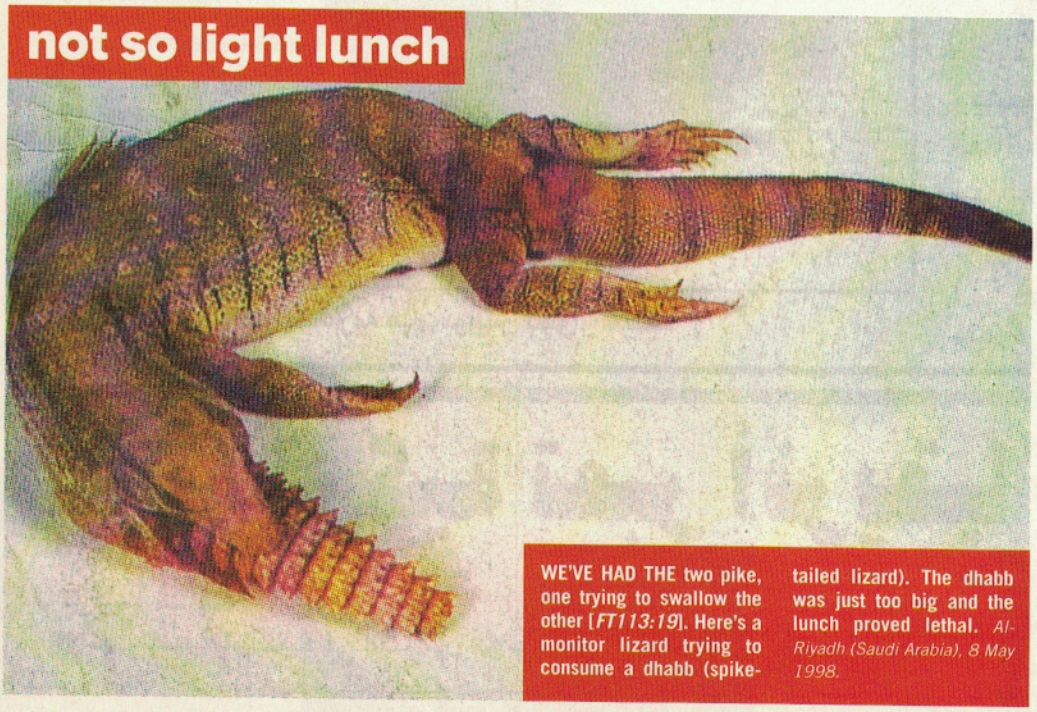
Almost the whole hair care industry is based on removing oil collected on human hair, so it was easy to convince NASA to start research. Scientists at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center said the crucial discovery was that oil gathered in layers on each hair (was *ad*sorbed) instead of chemically bonding with it (*ab*sorbed), which allowed for easy recovery of the oil by squeezing it from the collection bundles. Once the residue is shampooed out, the nylon mesh bags can be used again. Tons of hair are thrown into landfills every day, so a commercial use had been found for a waste product.

"One and a quarter pounds of hair [35g] can soak up a gallon [3.8 litres] of oil from water in less than two minutes," said McCrory. The same weight of an existing absorber, such as polypropylene, takes between 24 and 48 hours to do this. It is estimated that the cost of cleaning up oil spills will be reduced from $10 per gallon to just $2. *Brisbane Sunday Mail, 3 May; Guardian, 7 May; Times, 25 May 1998.*

IN THE AUTUMN of 2001, four and a half million people will have the chance to send a small part of themselves on a spaceship beyond the solar system. For $50 (about £30) they will be able to send four to six head hairs, cut to about an inch and including the bulb containing DNA unique to the owner.

"In theory at least," said David Goldstein of Encounter 2001, the consortium building the spacecraft, "an alien race could work out what we are made of from the hair samples on the spaceship, and possibly recreate human life." Next New Year's Eve, a radio message will be beamed into space announcing that the hair would soon be on its way. *D.Telegraph, 17 Mar; Kitchener (Ontario) Record, 21 Mar 1998.*

not so light lunch



WE'VE HAD THE two pike, one trying to swallow the other [*FT113:19*]. Here's a monitor lizard trying to consume a dhabb (spike-tailed lizard). The dhabb was just too big and the lunch proved lethal. *Al-Riyadh (Saudi Arabia), 8 May 1998.*

sidelines

CONFIDENCE SHAKEN: Thousands of Tehran citizens fled the city on 9 July after Lubomir Minarovjech, 74, a Slovakian with no connection to any scientific institution, wrote to the Slovak Embassy predicting that an earthquake would jolt the Iranian capital, probably on 10 or 13 July. The embassy faxed the letter to the Iranian authorities, but news got out and repeated statements by seismologists that the prediction was baseless failed to stem the panic. *Santa Barbara (CA) News Press, 7 July; Independent, 8 July 1998.*

WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN GOLD: A small tin of excrement, one of eight works by Piero Manzoni, an Italian conceptual artist who died in 1963, was sold for £17,250 at Sotheby's in London on 2 July. Manzoni produced a series of 90 tins of *merda d'artista*, labelled in English, French, German and Italian. Each tin of shit was signed, numbered and priced according to the daily market rate for gold. *[PA] 3 July 1998.*

STRUCK OUT: Greta Alexander from Illinois, who has died aged 66, claimed a lightning strike gave her psychic powers. She gained national attention for helping police find missing people and bodies. She said she could visualise the past, see the future, and describe events happening 100 miles away. *[AP] 19 July 1998.*

THE SHEER GALL OF IT: Sixteen former employees at an abattoir in Wagga Wagga, Australia, were charged with stealing gall stones from dead cows, believed to be destined for the Chinese medicine market. *D.Telegraph, 13 July 1998.*

ASP AND YE SHALL RECEIVE: Three men with bloodshot eyes thrust snakes at a woman in a taxi in New Delhi on 11 July, and demanded her money and jewellery. The woman, Roshni, turned the valuables over. *The Times of India* said that the same men had attacked several other women. *[AP] 14 July 1998.*

TAKING A BRIDE: A bridegroom was so drunk just minutes before his wedding in Hapur, near New Delhi, that his wife-to-be called in the police who took him off to their station. After the bride and her parents called off the wedding, a guest proposed to the woman and she readily agreed. *Halifax Eve. Courier, 10 July 1998.*

VIRGIN SAVED: A wooden statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary was the only item to survive when fire razed Corpus Christi church in Limerick, Ireland. Parishioners planned to place the newly-named Black Madonna of Moyross in a glass case. *Ireland on Sunday, 28 June 1998.*

LIZARD LOUNGERS: Hundreds of homeless, angry and malnourished South American green iguanas are loose in Los Angeles. Considered trendy pets just five years ago, what were once cute little lizards – shipped in by the thousands from Central America and sold in pet stores – are growing into 6ft-(1.8m)-long pests, as much fun to run into as Godzilla. They whip their owners with heavy tails, outrun them, leap through screens and land in swimming pools. *Independent, 17 June 1998.*

WIRED FOR WEIRD

This month, **JEFF KOYEN** guides the skiff across the river of online oddities.

NO-ROT FLESH

In 1971, Dr Gunther von Hagens invented plastination, a process of preserving organic material by replacing the water and fat in tissue with silicone. Plastinated tissue is odor-free, safe to handle and has a long shelf life. Recently, he began "sculpting" with plastinated body parts. His works offer macabre profiles in both human fragility and durability. Unfortunately, this Web site, run by the Institute for Plastination, is currently offered only in German, but worth a visit for the photos.
http://www.plastination.com

RING OF DEATH

The best thing about webrings – when they function properly, that is – is the consolidation they offer. Take the Ring of Death. Not only does this webring link together some fine sites (the Political Graveyard's index is the perfect work waster, and the Funeral Help Page is the web at its finest), but they also explicitly deny ring membership to all Gothic sites.
http://www.best.com/~gazissax/silence/ring/ring.html

MODERN MUMMIFICATION

For about US$63,000, the Salt Lake City-based Summum Organization will turn you into a mummy that would make Ramses proud. If that's a little beyond your budget, consider having your puss preserved: For US$4,500, they'll mummify any small animal up to 15lb (7g). Complete instructions and an image gallery are available at this site. ("Obtain a watertight container such as a cooler large enough to hold your pet covered in ice.") All prices include a plain bronze mummiform.
http://www.summum.org/mummification/

MILITARY STRATEGIES

The Strategic Studies Institute traces its roots to the 1947 Advanced Studies Group, formed by then Chief of Staff Dwight D. Eisenhower. But it's the Institute's current relationship with the Joint Staff, Institute for National Security Studies and Peacekeeping Institute which will hold interest for military conspiracists. Of particular note is the online publications catalog, featuring such titles as "Nonlethality and American Land Power" and other articles examining national security policy.
http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usassi/ssipubs/catalogs/catalog.htm#98

Jeff Koyen (jeff@nypress.com) lives and works in New York City, where the sky is beginning to fall.

lightning strikes back!

THE MYSTERY OF hill walkers and climbers – often young and healthy – found dead with no apparent cause may have been solved. Dr Michael Cherington and colleagues from the Lightning Data Center in Denver, Colorado, studied the case of four golfers sheltering under a tree when it was struck by lightning. One suffered superficial burns, another two were knocked unconscious but were otherwise unhurt, while the fourth, a 32-year-old man, collapsed with a heart attack. A doctor who happened to be nearby gave him artificial resuscitation before the man was taken to hospital, but he died without regaining consciousness 18 days later. There was not a mark on him. Usually lightning deaths are the result of a direct strike, side flash or ground current, all of which leave signs of injury.

In a letter to the medical journal the *Lancet*, the Denver experts suggested that unexplained hill walker deaths are the result of near-miss lightning strikes generating a huge magnetic pulse. Lightning bolts generate currents of 100,000 amps or more, which can produce intense magnetic fields up to a metre around the point of impact. "The lightning may induce loop current within the human torso without evidence of current entering the body," according to the experts. "If these currents occur during a vulnerable part of the cardiac cycle, they could cause asystole [stopped heart beat] or ventricular fibrillation [an often fatal abnormal heart rhythm]."

Weather forecasters advise that the most important thing to remember when caught in a thunderstorm is not to be the tallest object around. If you're in the open, lie down; and don't shelter under a tree. *Independent, D.Mail, Guardian, 12 June 1998.*

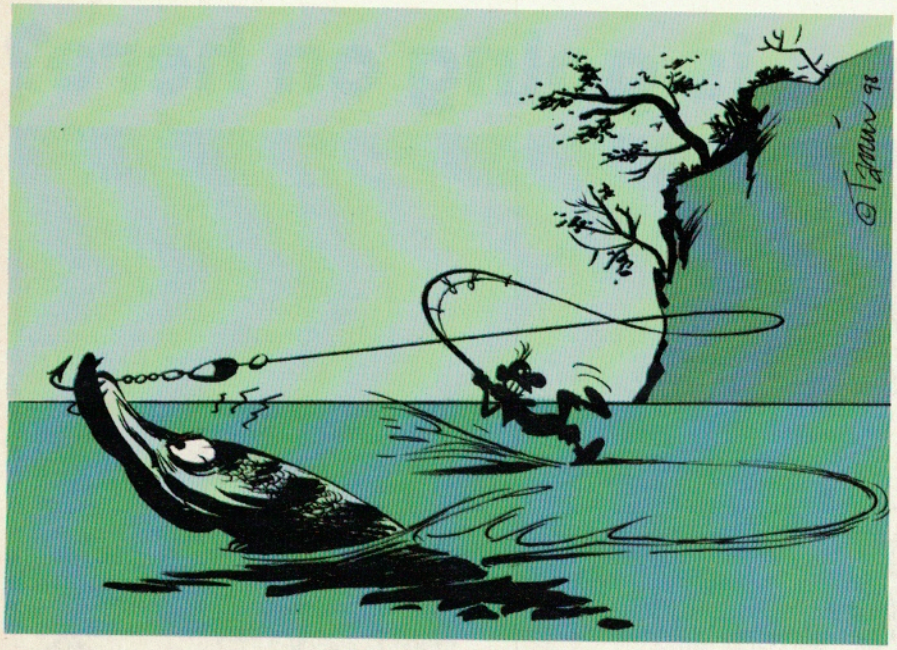
ON 7 JUNE, John Morrison, a 47-year-old oil rig captain, and his wife Linda, 41, witnessed two lightning strikes as they parked their ride-on lawnmowers in the garage of their detached house in Lower Southrepps, Norfolk. The first blasted a hole in the roof of their house, melting insulation and scattering tiles across the garden. The second hit the ground 6in (15cm) from Mr Morrison, leaving a hole in the garage roof and illuminating the garage with bright blue rings which set a toolbox aglow. Mr Morrison's computer and four phone lines were put out of action and water poured into the house from a ruptured copper pipe.

The cream cotton sweater he was wearing – about £20 from Next – had been a snug fit, but after the lighting it hung loosely off him, its sleeves stretching over his hands. Scientists were baffled by this elongation: an electric field could have caused some of the fibres to stretch, although this was thought to be unlikely. *D.Mail, 10 June 1998.*

SEVENTEEN PEOPLE WERE injured by a single lightning bolt as they sheltered under a tree during a junior football match in Aylesford, Kent, on 2 September 1995. It was thought to be Britain's biggest multiple lighting strike. Many were thrown several feet into the air. Fourteen of the group were treated by St Andrew's Hospital in Billericay, Essex, the biggest burns unit in Britain. Injuries included cardiac arrest, paralysis of the legs, ear drum rupture, spinal cord damage, double vision, confusion, amnesia, psychological trauma and psychosis. All 17 eventually recovered. Ten of the victims had a distinctive pattern (never before recorded) of miniature haemorrhages or small burn holes, about the size of a match head. These were on each toe and at one-inch (2.5cm) intervals around the soles of the feet. "They were quite deep and fairly painful," said one victim, Jackie Hunt. The phenomenon was dubbed "tip-toe signs". *Sunday Telegraph, 3 Sept 1995; Times, 12 Feb; Independent, Guardian, D.Telegraph, 4 July 1996.*

LONG ARM: John Morrison and the sweater.

ALBAN DONOHOE



FABRICE

ones that didn't get away

CHRIS BROWNE TOOK the wildest ride of his life after spearing a 10ft- (3m)-long striped marlin in a fishing contest on 19 April 1997. The fisherman was aqua-planing at speeds of up to 10 knots (11mph or 18km/h) for 90 minutes before the big game fish was reeled in near the Hen and Chicken Islands off the northern coast of New Zealand.

Browne said it was "a spur of the moment" decision to spear the 295lb (134kg) marlin, which at times dived to depths of 60ft (18m). He wasn't wearing breathing gear and managed to keep his head above water, hanging on to a 50ft (15m) rubber cord attached to the spear, which stretched to as much as 150ft (45m) during the tow. He was three miles (4.4km) out to sea before the marlin turned and made for the shore.

"At one stage I was very dubious whether I could handle it," he said. "I was very lucky, really. I just hung on and once I realised he was starting to tire, I knew I had him."

At 54, Browne is one of New Zealand's most experienced skin divers. He has been towed by kingfish before, but while marlin had been speared, none had been reeled in. Although the catch was thought to be a world record for a spear-fisher, Browne didn't win the contest because the rules required each contestant to spear nine fish and to weigh the biggest; besides, the marlin was too big for the judges' scales.

ON 28 MAY 1998, a young Scottish holiday-maker in Rockingham, south of Perth in Western Australia, didn't have Browne's good fortune. Angling from a pier, he hooked a giant fish, which pulled his rod into the water. He dived in and grabbed the rod. Witnesses believe he then became entangled in the line and was dragged through the waves to his death.

ANGLER ANGELO MAULE, 58, was killed when a trout caught on his line swung into his head, knocking him onto rocks at Val di Susa, Italy.

[AP] 21 April 1997; News of the World, 5 April; D.Mail, 29 May; Queensland Courier-Mail, 30 May 1998.

is there a doctor aboard?

RETIRED BUSINESSMAN KLAUS Schmidt, 64, suffered serious heart problems and had difficulty breathing at 11,000ft (3,350m) on a Lufthansa flight from Dublin to Frankfurt. The chief steward asked if there was a doctor on board and was met with the 40 raised arms of the entire German delegation to an international medical seminar in Ireland. Many were carrying newly-developed heart drugs in their hand luggage.

A professor from a heart clinic in Heidelberg loosened Mr Schmidt's collar while a specialist in microscopic surgery gave him an injection. Within minutes, the colour returned to Mr Schmidt's cheeks and he was breathing more easily. He was able to walk from the plane with some help. "I was lucky to choose the right flight," he told a stewardess. "I'd been thinking of flying back the next day and then changed my mind."

D.Telegraph, 5 May 1998.

EXTRA EXTRA

HEADLINES FROM NEWSPAPERS AROUND THE WORLD

AMERICANS DRIVEN TO SUICIDE BY FEAR OF DEATH
D. Telegraph, 6 June 1997.

S. AFRICA BATTLES INVASION OF ALIEN WATER-SNATCHERS
Daily Yomiuri (Japan), 15 June 1997.

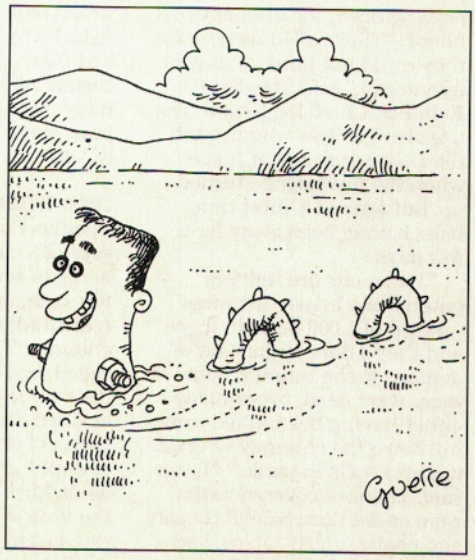
MONSTERS TAKE TO THE STREETS
Sunday Mail (Queensland), 15 June 1997.

GROIN KICK LED TO 7-DAY ERECTION
Examiner (Cork, Ireland), 17 June 1997.

DEAD GOLFER PLAYS HIS BEST ROUND
Sun, 21 June 1997.

MERLIN MEETS THE POPE
Reading Evening Post, 12 June 1997.

CHICKEN WITH ARTIFICIAL LEGS DIES A HERO
Associated Press, 27 June 1997.



THE LOCH NESS MUNSTER

what the flock is going on here?

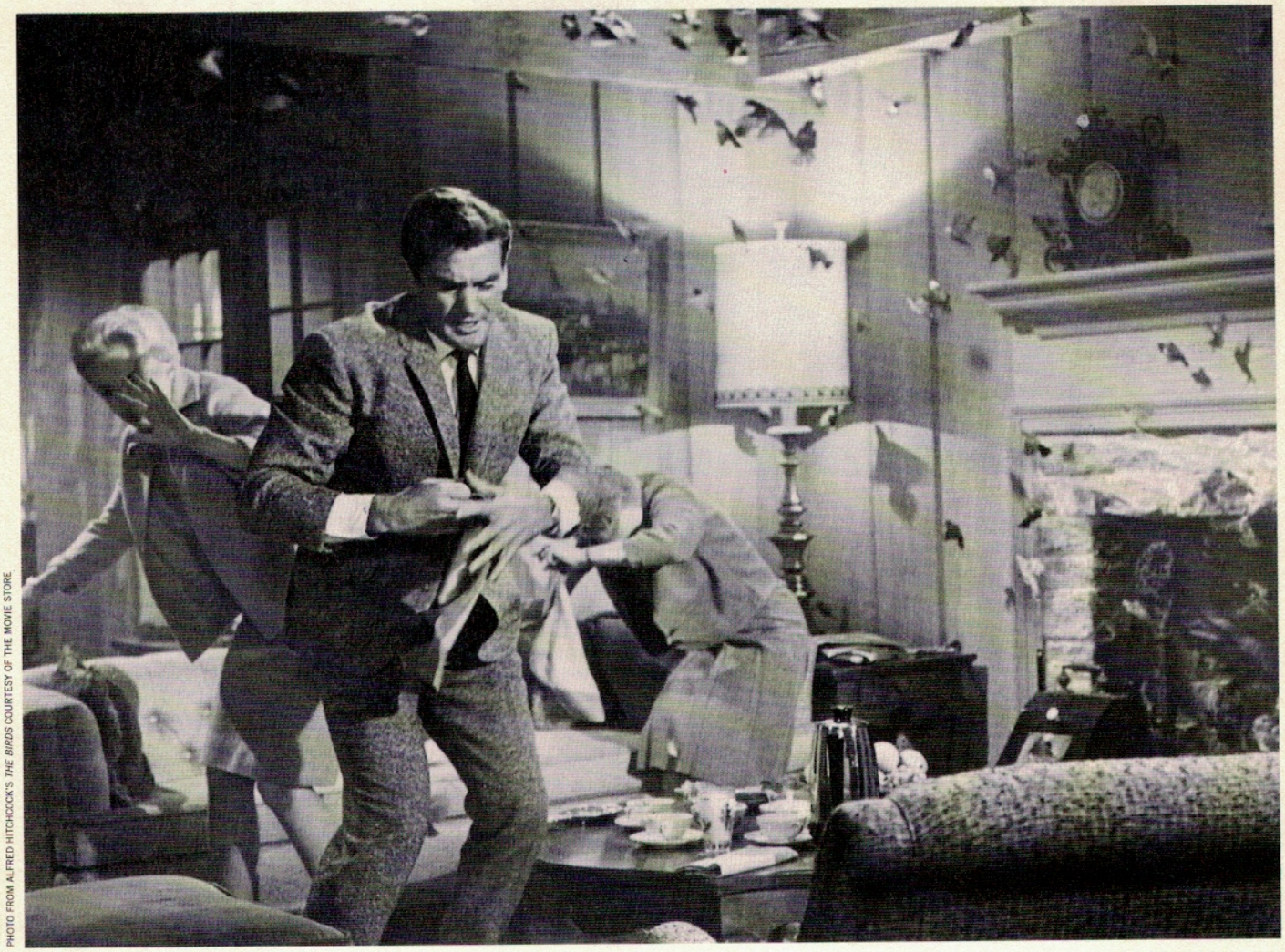


PHOTO FROM ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S *THE BIRDS* COURTESY OF THE MOVIE STORE.

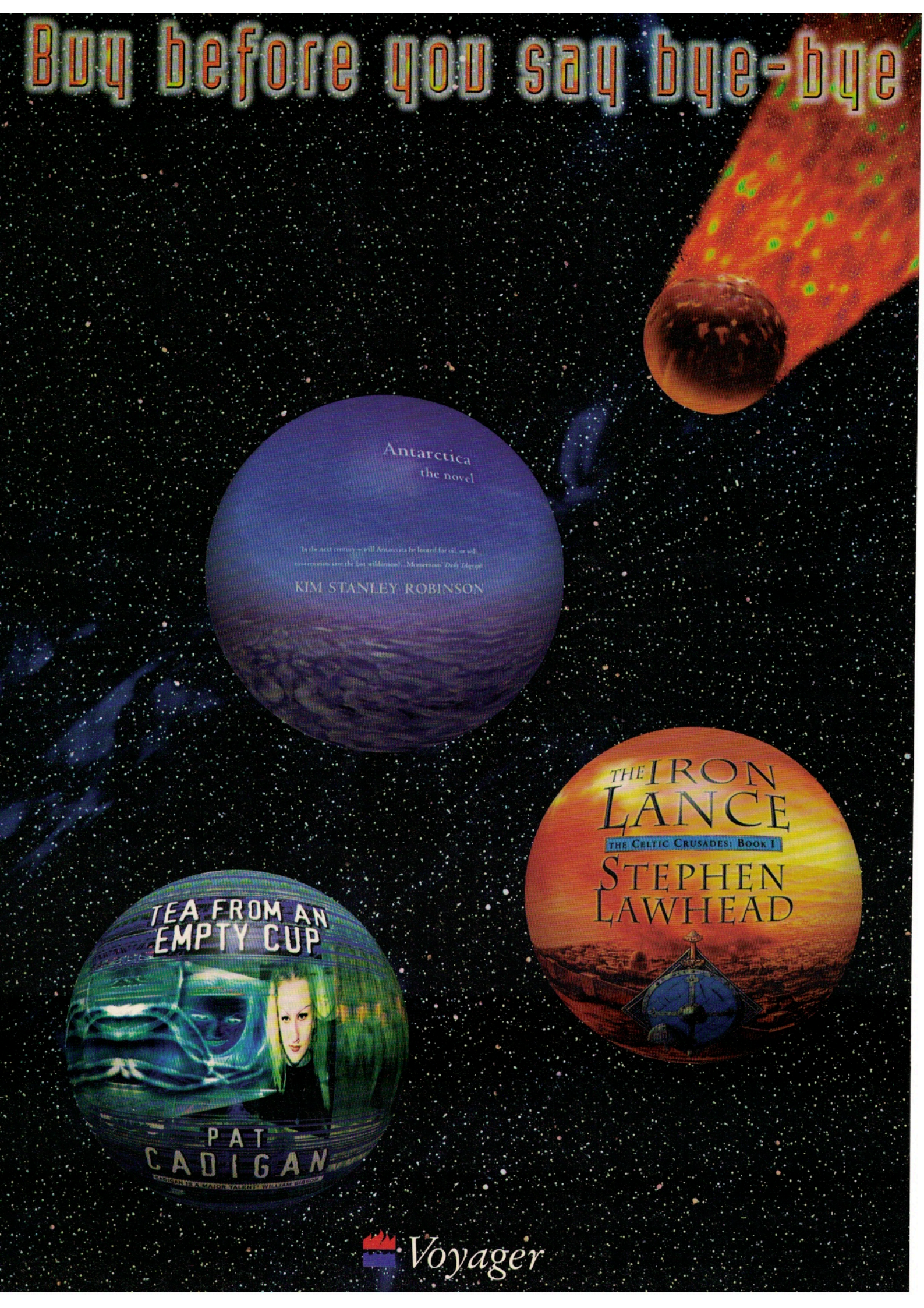
THE FIRE DEPARTMENT of Pasedena, California, were called out on the night of 4 May after a huge flock of swifts was seen disappearing down the chimney of a house. "They called us because they could not think of anyone else to call," said Fire Dept Battalion Chief Joe Nestor. The unnamed couple who lived in the house were not at home when the fire brigade turned up, but arrived a short time later, having been away for a few days.

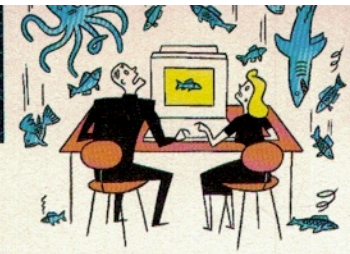
"When our fire fighters entered the house there was upward of 1,000 birds in there and they'd done quite a bit of damage to the interior. Some of them were dead, presumably either having been killed coming down the chimney or crashing into walls in panic," Nestor said. The soot-covered swifts were on the floor, behind couches and chairs, under tables, and perched on and behind pictures hung on the walls. The fire fighters opened all the doors and windows in the house, described as "fairly large", and shooed the migratory birds out, which took a good two hours. Asked why he thought the birds had flown down the chimney, Nestor said: "It beats me. It was rainy and stormy, that might have had something to do with it." *[R] 7 May 1998.*

CHRIS THOMAS AND her husband, Thomas Coy, and their seven-year-old son, Colby, were at home in Port Angeles, Washington state, on 9 May 1993 when a roar suddenly came from the chimney. The fire brigade was called, but before they arrived, the source of the ruckus crashed through the glass panes of the fireplace cover and several hundred black-and-white birds – not identified at the time of the report, but thought to be starlings and swallows – flew into the house, fanning soot with their wings. Most of them crapped inside the house.

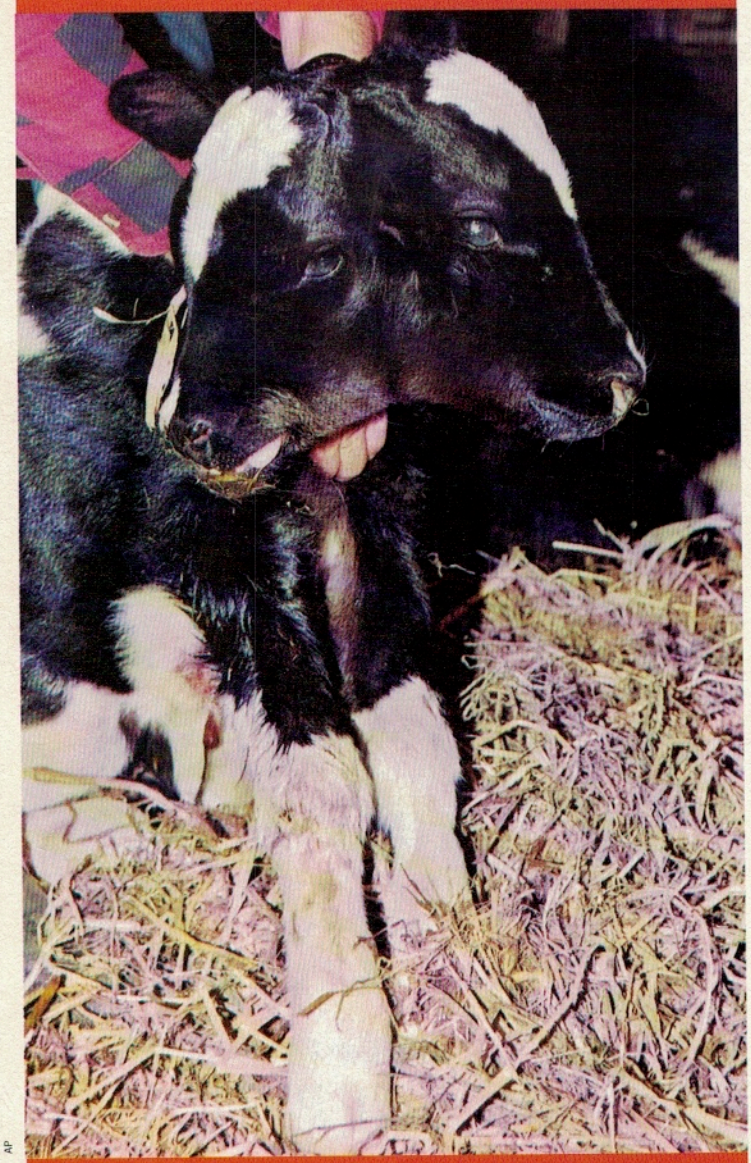
"I had just – just – completed redecoration of the whole downstairs" said Chris Thomas. "You cannot imagine what hundreds of loose birds can do." The firemen collected the birds with their hands, feet, brooms and other implements and released them outdoors. Once freed, the birds circled the house a few times and then flew back down the chimney. *[AP] 13 May 1993.*

THE MISSION TOWN of San Juan Capistrano in California welcomed back its celebrated swallows on 19 March. About 100 tourists exclaimed as the din of old bells roused a few scared swallows, which flitted over the ruined church. Over the mission's 200-year history, the birds have learned to build their round, mud nests under eaves of the buildings. They keep making the 7,500 mile (12,000km) migration from Argentina despite storms, earthquakes and modern strip development – but there have been precious few in recent years. A storm three weeks earlier washed about 10 nests away. They were replaced by ceramic replicas, and three of the new prefabs were already occupied. For the past three years the Mission has also been releasing ladybirds and lacewing larvæ to attract the birds. A "Return of the Swallows Fiesta" that began on 14 March drew about 12,000 people. The mission depends on its tourist revenue to restore one of Southern California's oldest buildings, which needs $10 million to stabilize the crumbling walls. The great stone church, begun in 1797 and built by local Indians, was virtually destroyed in an 1812 earthquake. Much of it is still encased in scaffolding. *Int. Herald Tribune, 16 Mar; [AP] 19 Mar 1998.*


Buy before you say bye-bye
Antarctica
the novel
KIM STANLEY ROBINSON
THE IRON LANCE
THE CELTIC CRUSADES: BOOK I
STEPHEN LAWHEAD
TEA FROM AN EMPTY CUP
PAT CADIGAN
Voyager



two-faced cow



AP

THIS TWO-HEADED, four-eyed, three-eared Holstein calf was born by Cæsarian section on 26 April on a farm in eastern Iowa. It was named "Reflections" because of the matching white patches on its two heads.

The calf appeared to have one brain – both tongues moving when it tried to lick – which made walking difficult, given the four eyes. It also had cleft palates in both mouths. *[R] 30 April 1998.*

a bogus inspector calls

WE ARE FAMILIAR with Bogus Social Workers (BSWs), but now there's a new variation: the Bogus Pet Inspector (BPI). The mystery man has been calling at houses in Wolverhampton and telling residents that they must take their pets to the local veterinary centre of the PDSA (People's Dispensary for Sick Animals), or he will call back later to collect them.

A spokeswoman for the charity said there had been calls from worried owners about bogus inspectors in the past, but in June there had been a sudden spate. The current BPI seemed to be targeting people who rescue unwanted animals and whose addresses or phone numbers had been published in connection with that. The PDSA does not operate an inspectorate. *Wolverhampton Express & Star, 17 June 1998.*

a jungle out there

IN BENGAL, A government programme is conquering the age-old terror of tigers. Following the discovery that tigers will only attack humans from behind, rubber masks have been issued which literally give people eyes in the backs of their heads. Combined with a programme of aversion therapy, in which life-size human dummies wired to car batteries have been left for tigers to attack, the system has cut killings by tigers from an annual average of 60 to three in 1997, up to the time of the report. *Observer, 16 Nov 1997.*

FRANK SPOONER

A HITHERTO UNKNOWN tribe was discovered in a remote corner of the Brazilian rainforest last April, but was not made public until early June. Their 12 cocoon-shaped huts were seen below the dense jungle canopy in a particularly isolated area of Acre state, near the border with Peru, by a group of government officials and anthropologists over-flying the region.

"We just happened to be flying at an angle that made it possible to spot them," said Sydney Possuelo, director of the Federal Indian Bureau Department of Isolated Indians. "It was like finding a needle in a haystack." The closest road is 80 miles (128km) away and local rivers are seldom navigated. It is estimated that 200 people make up the tribe and that they rely on hunted game, no crops having been seen nearby. It is also believed they are warriors who attack white "invaders". The search was triggered by reports that three colonisers from Jordão village, 75 miles (120km) away, had been killed by arrows.

The last such discovery in the Brazilian rainforest was in 1995 when anthropologists came upon an elderly Indian couple in the state of Goais who spoke an unrecorded language and had no ethnic links with other groups. But their village was never found and it is thought they were survivors of a settlement destroyed by colonisers moving in to farm the land.

Miners, loggers and poachers are pressing into uncharted areas of the rainforest, endangering indigenous groups such as the 23,000-member Yanomami, the world's largest Stone Age tribe. *Times, 9 June; Sunday Mail (Brisbane), 14 June; Guardian, 20 June 1998.*

FIELD OFFICERS OF the Indonesian social affairs office have recently discovered two nomadic tribes living in Irian Jaya near the Mamberamo river area, about 2,400 miles (4,000km) east of Jakarta. Members of the Vahudate and the Aukedate tribes are tall, with dark skin and curly hair, and speak using sign language. They roam the areas between Waropen Atas sub-district, Yapen Waropen district and the edge of the Mamberamo river in Jayapura district which borders with the Nabire, Puncak and Jayawijaya districts. Based on a preliminary survey, the Vahudate tribe has 20 families and the Aukedate tribe 33 families. Irian Jaya with its high mountains and deep valley has hundreds of distinct tribal groups speaking up to 800 dialects with many living far from the reach of government. New tribes are "discovered" almost every year. *[R] 25 June 1998.*

MEDICAL BAG

FT presents a roundup of dramatic operations including one where the patient almost literally lost her head – and some babies born with a head of hair!

BUSHY BABIES

STEVEN TOMLINSON WAS born in Barnsley, Yorkshire, in 1997 with a thick mop of black hair. Four weeks later it was shoulder-length and he had his first haircut. Jack Marsh from Standon, Hertfordshire, was born with hair on his head, arms, shoulders and back; eight months later it had all dropped off except for his head hair. Very appropriately, two of the mothers of babies born with head hair were hairdressers. One was Beverley Williams, 35, from Northants., who gave birth to Emelia (right) in January; the other was Kim Winstone (above left), 27, of Bristol, who produced Sophie in February. Eight weeks later, Sophie's black locks were flowing past her ears and she had a fringe down to her eyebrows. Mrs Winstone attributed the phenomenon to her daily pint of Guinness during the pregnancy – although the brewery put it down to coincidence.

These are undoubtedly cases of the rare congenital anomaly, hypertrichosis lanuginosa universalis. *D.Mail, 28 Feb, 7 Mar, 11 April; Bristol Eve. Post, 10 April 1998*

LOSING FACE

ON THE AFTERNOON of 16 September 1997, an unnamed 28-year-old mother of four was found by her partner with her face and scalp ripped off like a glove, leaving only her chin and one ear intact. Her hair had caught in a milking machine on their farm near Shepparton, Victoria, Australia. Her face and scalp were packed in ice and taken with her to St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne, where two teams of surgeons under Prof. Wayne Morrison, one of the world's leading plastic surgeons, spent 25 hours replacing her features. "What we saw was a head that essentially looked like what you see in an anatomical dissection," said Prof. Morrison.

Using microscopes, they reattached blood vessels and nerves using tiny stitches finer than a human hair. They worked from 10pm on the day of the accident until 11pm the following day. During that time, the woman was given 30 units of blood, almost double the body's eight pints (4.5 litres). Six days later, she was still in intensive care under heavy sedation, but Prof. Morrison said he was "fairly confident" that all the face would survive. She would look much as she did before the accident except for scars around her eyelids and chin. At the time of the operation, the film *Face/Off*, an action thriller starring John Travolta and Nicholas Cage as enemies whose faces are swapped by surgeons, had just started to show in Australia.

Once the graft had taken and the blood supply had been re-established, the biggest problem would be to restore feeling to the face and ensure the proper functioning of the eyelids and mouth. "They will need to take extreme care to protect the eyes, probably by sewing the eyelids together initially," said Stewart Watson, consultant plastic surgeon at Withington Hospital, Manchester. "Getting good eyelid function will be one of the many challenges as well as dealing with the junction of the skin at the nose and mouth so that it is not overstretched."

"This is a dry run for actually transplanting faces," said Prof. Morrison. "This is what we could only dream we could do" – although he admitted there were still formidable problems of tissue rejection to overcome. He knew of only one comparable operation performed before, several years ago in China. *[AFP,R] Times, 22 Sept; Independent, 23 Sept 1997.*

PASS THE RUSTY DRILL

IN A DRAMATIC episode destined to become part of Australian outback folklore, a British doctor used a woodworking drill for emergency brain surgery. Steve Hindley, 42, previously a GP in Cornwall, had been practising as a "bush locum" in the remote town of Ravensthorpe, Western Australia, for just a day when Hayden McGlinn, 23, collapsed in an Australian rules football game after a head-to-head collision. He was in a critical condition with a blood clot putting pressure on the brain. Dr Hindley knew that emergency neuro-surgery was needed, but realised that the sportsman was unlikely to survive until the Flying Doctor service arrived.

A specialist in the Charles Gairdner Hospital in Perth, 600 miles (965km) away, advised over the phone that the pressure should be relieved by boring a hole in the man's left temple. No suitable implement could be found in the Ravensthorpe cottage hospital (where Dr Hindley was the only doctor) and a dentist's drill proved useless. Finally, a rusting brace and bit was found in a school shed, which allowed Dr Hindley to perform the 15-minute procedure, once the tool was cleaned up and sterilised. The pressure on the brain was relieved and the patient flown to the Charles Gairdner Hospital, where he was slowly recovering. The brace and bit was to be mounted in a glass case and displayed over the bar in Ravensthorpe's only pub. *D.Telegraph, Guardian, Independent, Western Morning News, 14 July 1998.*

OFF WITH HER HEAD!

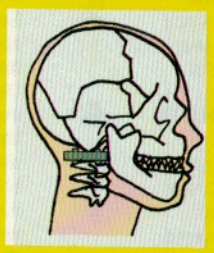
BRIDGET FUDGELL, 36, suffers from ankylosing spondylitis, which progressively fuses bones in the spine together. After she broke her neck in a fall down stairs in 1993, her head became fixed in a downward position, looking slightly to the right. "I could not go out very often as I couldn't see to cross the road," she said. She was resigned to a lifetime of pain, immobilty and depression, having been told by many doctors that nothing could be done to alleviate her condition.

Following an accident, head points downwards

However, she was cured in Frenchay Hospital, Bristol, in February 1997. In a 17-hour operation, the first of its kind in the world, neurosurgeon Steve Gill detached her head from her spinal column, leaving it connected by just the spinal chord, key blood vessels and the skin at the front of her neck. Gill then cut a 30° wedge out of the base of her skull and the top vertebra before fixing her head back with a metal plate and two screws, leaving her looking forward.

Wedge cut in the skull to correct the angle

"It was a difficult thing to do in the area where critical blood vessels supply the brain and spinal chord," said Gill, who presented the case to the British Society of Neurosurgeons last September. "There comes a point where the head is loose relative to the neck and you have to start manoeuvring the neck around, avoiding any pressure on any of these structures. That is quite a precarious time."



Head fixed in place using metal plate and screws

Dr Gill had carried out radical surgery before. In 1995 he drilled a hole in the head of a man suffering from Parkinson's disease – while the patient was awake – to implant an electrode. *[R] D.Telegraph, Guardian, 13 Sept; D.Mail, 23 Sept 1997.*

ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER with the latest from planet cryptozoology

MUNTJACS, MUNTJACS, EVERYWHERE!

During faunal surveys in Myanmar (formerly Burma) led by conservationists Dr Alan Rabinowitz and Saw Tun Khaing during 1996 and 1997, west of the Mali Hka River and along the survey route between the Mali Hka and Mai Hka Rivers, two species of muntjac (barking deer) were recorded that were previously unknown in Myanmar. One of these, however, was also previously unknown to science! This newly-discovered, mountaintop-dwelling species is known colloquially as the leaf muntjac because, according to Burmese hunters, its diminutive red-furred body is small enough for it to be wrapped inside a single leaf from a local species of tree.

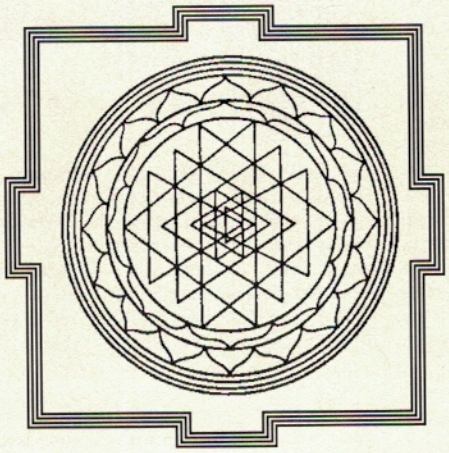
Although this may be an exaggeration, the leaf muntjac is nonetheless one of the world's smallest barking deer species. It is currently known to science from 10 skulls (with characteristically short, unbranched antlers) and one complete specimen collected between the villages of Alanga and Shinshanku. The leaf muntjac has yet to be officially described and named, but it is certainly not alone in this respect. Three other newly-revealed muntjac species – all hailing from Vietnam's Annamite mountains – are also awaiting description and naming, following the recent formal documentation and christening of yet another new Annamite barking deer, the Truong Son muntjac, *Muntiacus truongsonensis*, in what has rapidly become a veritable stampede of cryptozoological revelations emanating from this particular region of southeastern Asia since the early 1990s. *Oryx, July 1998; Animal Conservation, vol. 1 (1998).*

CRYPTIC CHAMELEONS IN GREECE

A previously-overlooked population of unusual chameleons that may be of considerable zoological significance has been discovered living around the Pylos Lagoon in Greece by biologist–photographer Andrea Bonetti, who has been secretly studying them for the past two years. Not only are they larger than the normal, known species of

designs on the desert

ONE OF THE most intricate large-scale drawings of recent years – eclipsing most designs in English cereal fields – was made on a dry lake bed east of Steens Mountain in the Alvord Desert of south-eastern Oregon. It was spotted by Lieut Col Bill Miller of the Idaho Air National Guard during a routine flyover out of Boise on 10 August 1990. He returned to photograph it from his jet on 24 August, but the drawing was not made public until the second week in September. It was a 1,563ft-(476m-) wide Hindu meditation design known as a Sri Yantra (illustrated here).



"We can't figure out why somebody would go to such effort to do this out in god-awful nowhere," said a spokesman for the Air National Guard.

Some suggested it was the work of a cult or made by a laser beam from a spaceship. On 19 September, the *Burns (Oregon) Times-Herald* carried a letter from a Fairfield, Iowa, artist called Bill Witherspoon, who confessed to creating the design with five others.

However, James W Deardorff, a retired professor at the Department of Atmospheric Sciences of Oregon State University, didn't believe that such an intricate design had been executed so precisely with such primitive equipment and wondered at the 40-day delay between spotting the design and making it public. "My own concern in this," wrote the paranoid academic, "is that some group in some branch of our government is behind this in doing their best to keep the citizenry from connecting this ground pattern to the patterns in the wheat in southeast England [sic], for example because of the reported UFO associations of the latter."

However, it seems almost certain that the design was "trenched" by Bill Witherspoon, his 10-year-old son Miles, architect Tony Lawler, a film maker and two others, working from a set of 30in (76cm) square blueprints drawn up by Lawler.

They used an old John Deere garden cultivator pulled by hand, 12 miles (19km) of twine, some sticks, flags and nails, a tape measure and a pair of binoculars. "No transits, compasses, lasers or other modern methods of determining direction, proportion and placement were used," said Witherspoon, in a letter to the *Burns Times-Herald*.

The design, more than 30 miles (48km) from the nearest metalled road, was begun on 31 July and completed 10 days later at about 3am on 9 August. The group camped three quarters of a mile (1,200m) from the site.

The work done, Witherspoon went to a nearby ranch to arrange travel home over the phone. Looking across the desert about 5.30pm, he saw clouds gather and lightning flash. A rare localised cloudburst dumped about half an inch (1.25cm) of water in Mickey Basin where the drawing was done. "Outside of Mickey Basin, it didn't rain," he said. "But it rained enough at the site to seal the alkali and wash away our tracks. The last thing an artist does after he's finished is to varnish the canvas. Nature sealed [the desert drawing]. Nature varnished the canvas."

Though no damage was done, the Bureau of Land Management fined Witherspoon and his group for defacing a Wilderness Study Area without permission.

Columbian (Vancouver, WA), 14 Sept; Oregonian (Portland OR), 15 Sept; Times-Herald (Burns, OR), 19 Sept, 24+31 Oct, 14 Nov 1990.

For other large-scale landscape art, see the reports on Andrew Scott [***FT63:9***], Simon English [***FT75:34-36***] and Isabelle de Beaufort [***FT110:7***].

won't see you later alligator

WORKERS FIXING HIGHWAY lights near New Castle in Delaware, USA, on 30 June spotted an 8ft (2.4m) long alligator near Interstates 295 and 495. It was about 10ft (3m) from the highway guard-rail. Though dead and covered in flies, it was intact and had no apparent wounds. How it had turned up in a place far too far north for alligators to live was a mystery. John E Caldwell, director of Delaware's Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, speculated that it might have been dumped by a cargo ship and made its way to marshland near the highway. "This is certainly a first," he said. The carcass was buried by the Delaware Department of Transportation.
Wilmington (DE) News Journal, 1 July 1998.

lucky accident

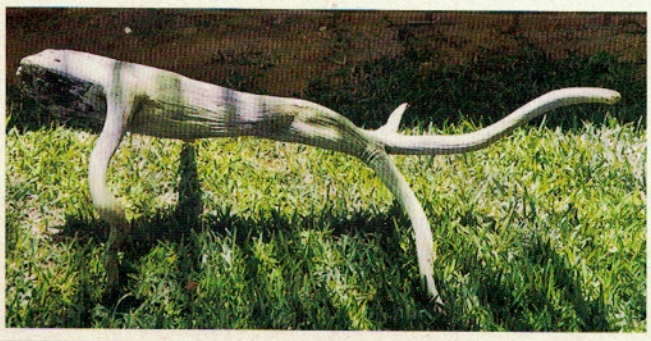
PAUL BARKER

THREE-YEAR-OLD Jennifer Simpson from Yeadon, West Yorkshire, swallowed a pound coin, began coughing and struggled to breathe. Her parents, Alan and Linda Simpson, bundled her and her elder brother Thomas, eight, into the car and set off for Wharfedale General Hospital in Otley six miles (10km) away.

Jennifer began to slip in and out of consciousness. Then the car skidded into the opposite lane on Billam's Hill, Otley, and was struck side-on by an oncoming van. The impact dislodged the coin in Jennifer's windpipe, allowing her to breathe again, but her brother suffered a bump on the head. The car was a write-off, so a passing motorist took Mrs Simpson and the children on to hospital while Mr Simpson stayed at the scene of the accident. Thomas had his head wound stitched up and the coin was removed from Jennifer's throat several hours later after she was transferred to Leeds General Infirmary.

Mrs Simpson said: "We are looking on it as a miracle because she would not have made it to the hospital even though we were only two minutes away. The accident must have moved the coin further back in her windpipe." *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 9 June 1998.*

SIMULACRACORNER



This dried root 'mouse' (top) was found after heavy rain in the Australian outback and was presumably washed down from the surrounding bush. Photo by Mervyn FW Nightingale of Londonderry, New South Wales.

The other wooden creature, grown from one branch, was photographed in the Peruvian resort town of Máncora in September 1996 by Jill Elizabeth Hallowell of Ealing, London.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the editorial post box (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) and we'll pay a fiver or ten dollars for any we use.

ALIEN ZOO CONTINUED

European chameleon, *Chamæleo chamaeleon*, they more closely resemble the African chameleon *C. africanus*. So how did they come to be living in Greece? As for their taxonomic status, they may prove to be conspecific with the African chameleon, or even a distinct, hitherto-unrecognised species in their own right. *BBC Wildlife, July 1998.*

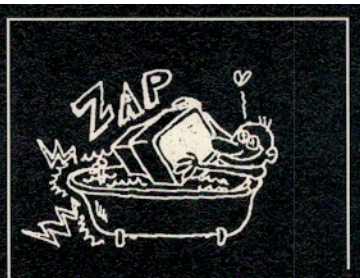
MAKING A MONKEY OUT OF CHIMP TAXONOMY

The common chimpanzee *Pan troglodytes* has been traditionally split into three subspecies, but according to DNA analysis results released by a team of New York City anthropologists, there could well be four. Their results reveal that a chimpanzee population existing in western Cameroon and southern Nigeria is genetically distinct from all three currently recognised subspecies. If sufficiently distinct to warrant the formal recognition of a fourth subspecies, they propose that it should be dubbed *Pan troglodytes vellerosus*. This would revive a name first applied back in the 1860s by J E Gray from London's Natural History Museum to a skin collected on Mount Cameroon by British explorer Sir Richard Burton. *Nature, 24 July 1998.*

RETURN OF THE PARADISE PARROT?

Named after its extraordinarily beautiful plumage, Australia's paradise parrot was last reported in the wild during 1926 in Queensland's Goondiwindi region, and the last captive specimen died in 1931. Since then, this spectacular species has been written off as extinct, although unconfirmed sightings have been reported spasmodically.

The latest sighting was aired during a recent programme on *ABC Radio*, hosted by National Parks and Wildlife Service ranger Rick Nattrass, when a caller gave an accurate description of a paradise parrot that he claimed to have seen flying from a termite nest in the Goondiwindi region. Although he concedes that it may be a hoax, Nattrass is eager to investigate the report further, just in case specimens of this red-shouldered recluse have indeed survived undetected until now by science. *Illawarra Mercury, 27 June 1998.*



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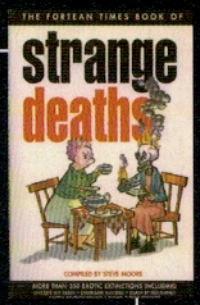

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S340

a case for Special Branch?

SHERRI SLOAN

WOOD YOU BELIEVE IT?

(Top left): The mystery clearing in the woods found at Nuoksujärvi.

(Bottom left and right): How did this huge boulder get up a tree in Indiana? The height of the tree is amply demonstrated by the figure of Brad Price showing his friends Jim and Sherri Sloan his strange discovery.

SHERRI SLOAN

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE a good geophysical mystery in the middle of nowhere to confound those who presume to explain everything. At a place called Nuoksujärvi near Junosuando in northern Sweden, a strange clearing was found in the snow-covered woods in early April. It was on the east side of the Torne Älv river, measured 130ft (40m) by 16ft (5m) and was slightly curved in the middle. Small trees were splintered and strewn in different directions, and the snow was gone. Low shrubs on the ground were unharmed. The clearing was nowhere near any road or path and there was not a mark in the snow outside the clearing.

Rosa Sjösund and Estrid Enkvist, who live nearby, had no idea what had caused the clearing, but since watching *The X-Files* on TV they jokingly speculated that a UFO had tried to land. The only reasonable explanation seemed to be a tornado or an unusual lightning strike, but according to the meteorologists at Luleå air force base there was no evidence that either had occurred in the area in recent months.

Expressen (Sweden), 29 April 1998.

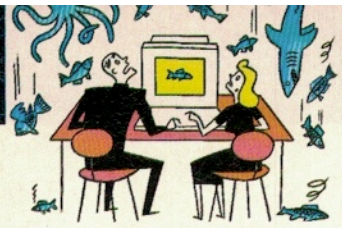
ANOTHER PUZZLE WAS discovered in Yellowwood State Forest, Indiana, in April 1997. Brad Price from Martinsville was out hunting turkeys in the 23,000-acre forest when he heard a 'gobbler' call in the distance and found a tom turkey perched on a huge rock wedged between three branches of an oak tree about 35ft (11m) from the ground. The arrow-shaped rock was about 1ft (30cm) thick and 5ft (1.5m) long and was estimated to weigh 500lbs (227kg).

Brad didn't tell anyone about the rock for some months, thinking that no-one would believe him. This year, however, he let his friends Jim and Sherri Sloan in on the secret and took them out in the forest to see it. Sherri took photographs.

The Sloans told WFYI television station about 'Gobbler's Rock'. To keep the location secret, Sherri led the camera crew for the *Across Indiana* show through the woods with potato sacks over their heads. The programme was broadcast last April. Jim Allen, property manager at Yellowwood, said the only possible explanation he could think of was that a tornado dropped it there. If so, it must have been many years ago as there is no sign of tornado damage in the area today.

Neither had there been any construction or road building in the forest that would have led to blasting in the area. In any case, it would have taken a mighty explosion to send a rock that size flying. It also seemed very unlikely that somebody put the rock up there in such a remote location. What could be the motive? Anyway, the equipment needed to put such a rock so high would definitely have left some evidence, such as knocked-over trees or ruts in the hillside.

Bloomington (IN) Herald Times, 25 Mar; White River Valley (Morgan County, IN), 28 Mar-3 April 1998.



WEIRD SCIENCE

PAUL PARSONS turns his telescope towards this month's collection of heavenly bodies. He can be reached by email at pparsons@pavilion.co.uk.

LUCY IN THE SKY

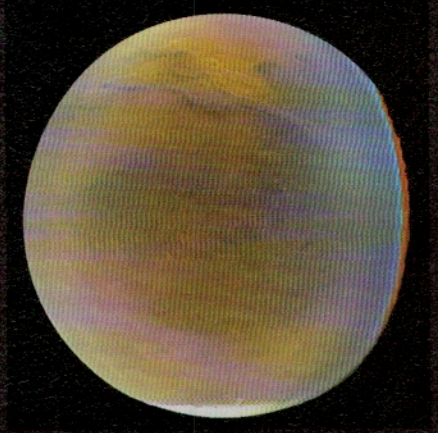
Astronomers at the University of Iowa have found a diamond the size of the Earth. But don't all run off – it's 17 light years away in the constellation of Centaurus, and even if you could go there, you'd be squashed flat by its gravity. The monster sparkler is actually a cooling white dwarf – a star made of carbon and oxygen. The density inside the star has become so great that the carbon has been squashed to form a diamond with an estimated weight of 10 billion trillion trillion carats. Compare that to the largest diamond on Earth, owned by the De Beers mining company and weighing in at a feeble 1,462 carats. *Sunday Times, 17 May 1998.*

THE LEONIDS ARE COMING!

Between five and 10 man-made satellites are expected to bite the dust this November when the annual Leonid meteor storm reaches the peak of its 30-year cycle. The Leonids are tiny particles of dust left behind by comet Tempel-Tuttle and which orbit the Sun in a belt on the comet's path. The Earth passes through this dust belt every 15–20 November and the small fragments, travelling at up to 43 miles (70km) per second, strike the planet's atmosphere leaving spectacular trails across the night sky. Every 30 years Earth passes through the belt's densest region; this is set to happen this year. Astronomers say the hourly rate of visible meteors could reach 10,000. *Guardian, 7 May 1998.*

MARS-ON-SEA

The idea that Mars once had oceans sloshing about on its surface gained yet more credence recently. Images returned from the Mars Global Surveyor (MGS) spacecraft, which has been orbiting the Red Planet since September, showed surface markings resembling a shoreline. MGS has also found a crater in Mars' southern hemisphere which shows signs of fluid seepage around its edge, as well as crystalline deposits near the planet's equator which normally grow in water. *New Scientist, 6 June 1998.*



PHILIPPE PLAILLY/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

OH I DO LIKE TO BE BESIDE THE SEASIDE: Has Mars' ancient shoreline been revealed?

WHY THE WIND BLOWS

Researchers in the US think they have figured out how hurricanes can destroy one house but leave the one next door unblemished. They say hurricanes comprise tubes of wind, aligned parallel to the direction the wind is blowing in. The tubes rotate together, like a meshed train of gear wheels, forming alternating updrafts and downdrafts every few hundred metres where the sides of the tubes meet. Analysing data recorded during hurricane Fran in 1996, the American team find that only structures under the downdrafts get flattened. *New Scientist, 2 May 1998.*

THE ICE MOONS COMETH

Curious domes seen on the surface of Jupiter's frozen moon Europa suggest that if the moon does harbour an ocean of liquid water, as many scientists believe, then it doesn't lie that far beneath Europa's surface ice. The domes are thought to be formed when lower regions of warmer ice rise, deforming the outer layers. The discovery was made by NASA's Galileo probe, which has also recently found quantities of Epsom salts on the surface of Europa (1998) and evidence for an ocean on Europa's sister moon Callisto. *Times, 22 May; New Scientist, 6 June 1998.*

In separate work, astronomers using the Hubble Space Telescope have found that Neptune's icy moon Triton is warming up at an alarming rate. The Sun is currently over Triton's south pole and astronomers had expected this to cause a small amount of warming. But the temperature rise over the last 10 years – about three degrees centigrade – has now vaporised enough ice to double the volume of the moon's atmosphere. *New Scientist, 27 June 1998.*

CRYPTON FACTOR

Mysterious cosmic rays which smack into the Earth's upper atmosphere could be caused by the demise of an even stranger subatomic particle called a crypton. Cosmic rays are tiny particles which each pack the energy of a fast tennis serve – but astronomers have been at a loss to explain their origin. Now physicists at Oxford University say the decays of nearby cryptons could explain the rays from space. Cryptons, which weigh a trillion times as much as a single cosmic ray, might also contribute to the elusive dark matter of the universe. *New Scientist, 27 June 1998.*

NOWT STRANGER THAN STARS

A scientist in Israel believes he has located the first in a new breed of star, so odd that it's been named a "strange" star.

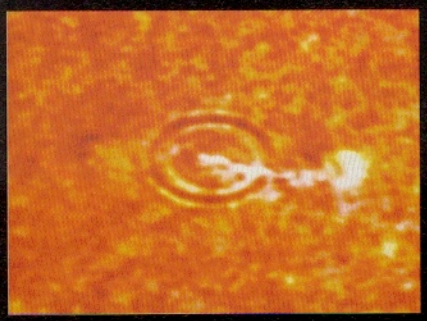
"Strange" stars are closely related to neutron stars – superdense balls of neutron particles formed when the core of a massive star collapses during a supernova explosion. Neutron stars pack the mass of the Sun into a sphere just 6.2 miles (10km) across. But strange stars are even denser – solid spheres of quarks, the fundamental particles from which neutrons are made.

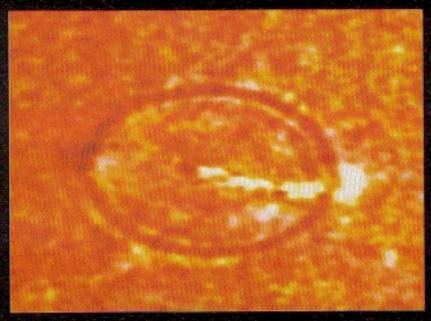
In 1984 it was suggested that quarks, previously thought only to exist inside other particles, could exist on their own, in a superdense state known as quark matter. A cubic centimetre of quark matter weighs about a billion tonnes. Strange stars are believed to be made from quark matter, but distinguishing them from neutron stars has so far proved too difficult for astronomers.

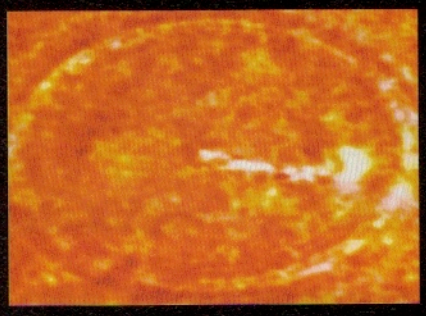
Now though, physicist Vladimir Usov, of the Weizmann Institute, Israel, has come up with three criteria for sky watchers to look for. Firstly, strange stars emit 10–100 more X-rays than a neutron star; secondly, these X-rays are emitted in pulses each lasting about a millisecond; and finally, a strange star should be surrounded by a glow of gamma rays, radiation with even higher energy than X-rays. The first two properties were indentified by Usov in *The Astrophysical Journal Letters* on 1 June 1997.

Usov says he has found an object, called 1E1740.7-2942, located near the centre of our own galaxy, which satisfies all three criteria. He's now trying to refine his observational test to find more examples of this brand new class of astronomical object.

More information can be obtained from the Institute's website at http://weizmann.ac.il.







TWISTERS AND SHAKERS

As well as being rather hot, the Sun is home to the Solar System's worst gales and most violent seismic activity. Scientists using the Solar and Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO) recently watched in awe as a solar flare raised a seismic wave 3km (1.8 miles) above the Sun's surface. The resulting quake raged with 40,000 times the energy of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and reached 74,567 miles (120,000km) from the site of the flare.

Another team have used SOHO to detect 124,278mph (200,000km/h) tornadoes at the Sun's poles. Many believe these twisters are the cause of the solar wind – a torrent of electrically charged particles that streams from the Sun. At its peaks, the solar wind can cause spectacular magnetic storms on Earth, damaging communications and power systems.

With solar activity set to peak in the year 2000, Scientists were counting on SOHO to give them advance warning of these storms, but the spacecraft was lost in July. *New Scientist, 30 May, 4 July; D.Telegraph, 29 April 1998.*

AP

not just a tall tale...

HAJI MOHAMMED ALAM Channa, 42, said to be the world's tallest man, died in New York in early July from kidney failure. He was also said to hold the record for the world's biggest feet at size 22. Born in Pakistan's southern Sindh province, he grew until he was 28, reaching 7ft 7in (231.8cm) according to the *Guinness Book of Records* – although he claimed he was 7ft 8in (233.7cm). An AP report said the tallest man in the world – at 7ft 8in (235cm) – is Ri Myong-hun of North Korea.

Orphaned at the age of five, Alam Channa had only a few years of schooling before working in the fields. His height then made him a minor celebrity, travelling the world as "Pakistan's mobile ambassador". However, he had not been able to stand for years. An overactive pituitary gland produced the growth hormone which made him into a giant, but also inhibited production of insulin; and complications from diabetes led to kidney and bladder problems and damaged the nerves in his legs and spine. He had only one functioning kidney. He blamed the start of his troubles on a bad car accident in 1988 and in 1995 another crash exacerbated his back problems. "Before I became ill I was very happy, but now I just wish I had been normal," he said.

Since August 1997, his 400lb (181kg) frame had been confined to two hospital beds joined end-to-end in a windowless basement room of Islamabad's Shifa hospital, with four constant attendants and companions. Local doctors argued they were capable of performing the reconstruction of his bladder and other surgery to ease his pain, but his supporters were adamant he be treated in the US at government expense. Eventually, prime minister Nawaz Sharif ordered Channa to be sent abroad. He went into a coma in New York's Westchester County Medical Center in June and was unable to travel to Houston where he was to have treatment. He is survived by a son who is of normal height.

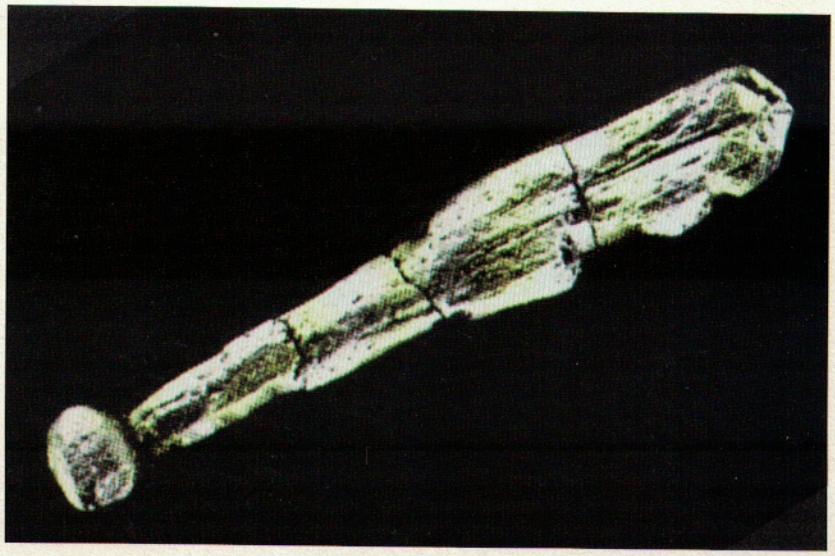
The tallest man of whom there is irrefutable evidence was the American Robert Pershing Wadlow (1918–40). Two weeks before his death he was 8ft 11.1in (272cm) tall. He was still growing and would probably have topped 9ft (274cm) if he had survived for another year. The tallest recorded 'true' (non-pathological) giant was Angus Macaskill (1823–63), of the Western Isles of Scotland, who stood 7ft 9in (236cm). *Guardian, 1 Dec; Times, 10 Dec 1997; [AP] Evening Standard, 3 July; Guardian, Times, Mirror, Sun, 4 July 1998. For more on giants, see* ***FT101:32, 106:53, 112:52.***

howzat for a bat

CRICKET MIGHT BE more than 5,000 years old. Earlier evidence in the form of a cricket bat fashioned from a fossil elephant femur and found under a hedge at Piltdown, Sussex, in 1914 turned out to be part of the great Piltdown "Dawn Man" hoax [***FT62:24-30***]. However, what could be the world's oldest cricket bat (pictured) has been found by a Museum of London survey in the mud of the Thames at Chelsea, just above the usual low-water mark near some ancient fishing stakes.

Initially thought to be Saxon, the oak bat has been carbon-dated to between 3,540 BC and 3,360 BC. The 30in (76cm) bat has a rounded handle with a baseball bat-type knob at the end. Surrounding it were stone axes and remains of a prehistoric forest.

The first recorded game of a form of cricket was in 1737. The match was played on Kennington Common (now in south London), between the City of London and the County of Surrey on the one hand, and Kent on the other. *Guardian, D.Mail, 4 July 1998.*



FORTEAN BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

MARK PILKINGTON

MAKERS: Busty Taylor (left) entertains Rob Irving (centre).

10 YEARS AFTER THE FIRST CROP CIRCLES APPEARED, THEY ARE STILL A CAUSE FOR DEBATE – BUT AS PHENOMENON OR FOLK ART? **MARK PILKINGTON** TRAVELS TO THE 3RD ANNUAL CELEBRATION TO INVESTIGATE.

Well, it's that time of year again and, after almost a decade of continuous activity in Southwest England, the force behind the formations shows little sign of slowing down. As early as mid-July, there had been about 40 designs swirled into the fields around Alton Barnes in Wiltshire, the heart of circle country. The second weekend in July saw the third annual Crop Circle Celebration organised by the Wiltshire Crop Circle Study Group. For £45, visitors from all over the world could hear international experts discuss the spiritual influence of crop circles in world affairs, discover the psychic world, feel the breath of Gaia and buy circle-energised pendants, T-shirts, key rings and doormats. About the only thing they wouldn't learn about was the source of their wonder, the circlemakers themselves, who, we later found out, were unwelcome at this otherwise spiritually superior gathering.

Farmer Fiddler wanted £1.50 for a look at the by now rather tatty crop pattern in his field, a string of circles with a kind of palm tree at one end known as the Lockeridge formation. So said the two cheery, baggy-trousered young lads with the collection box anyway. Being three – myself, my friend Ed and our guide for the day, veteran circlemaker Rob Irving – we were granted a group discount. This was my first intrusion into a crop circle and I was surprised both by its size and the apparent simplicity of its design. A passing dowser also expressed surprise: "This one", he said with some authority, "is different from the others". He showed me how dowsing rods crossed at the conjunction of two of the circles, uncrossed inside the next, then crossed again in the largest of the set. Proving that the rods weren't affected by wind, he did it again, walking back the other way. He was sure this meant something. But what?

Rob Irving was more confident. This formation wasn't the work of professionals – it was cut too low on the hillside and couldn't be seen clearly from the road. "About an hour's trampling for three", he reckoned, adding wistfully, "I suppose you can get too nostalgic for quality". Though the tithe collectors didn't know who'd made it, a man taking soil samples earlier thought it had been produced by wind vortices. Colin Andrew, the "World's Foremost Authority on Crop Circles" and recent recipient of a research grant from Laurence Rockefeller, reported that mysterious lights had been seen in the area the night the formation appeared. The next night a mysterious glowing "Z" was seen over the sea along the west coast of England.

A helicopter passed overhead, darkly silhouetted against the grey skies. Sadly not the MoD, who had apparently been spotted in the area, but part of the celebration – a £35, 18-minute tour of the latest agriglyphs. Once it had gone there was a swishing, rustling sound off to the side. Irving was spinning around in the crop, staring intently at the ground. He was back 90 seconds later, leaving behind a perfectly formed 8ft (2.4m) circle. Luckily, we were prepared, placing Ed's compass in its neatly swirled centre. This was a genuine crop circle all right.

THIS ONE WAS A GENUINE CROP CIRCLE ALL RIGHT

Alton Barnes itself is a cluster of small red brick buildings lining the road between several large fields. Our first stop, the Barge Inn, nestles on the bank of a canal behind a large lumber yard. Its garden commands a magnificent view of the famed White Horse, though this, it has to be said, looks a little tawdry next to some of the more impressive formations. Curious circle seekers will find everything they need to know in the "Education Department", the pub's back room, given over entirely to the phenomenon. Its walls are covered with maps, diagrams and photographs; its ceiling an artfully painted interpretation of the mythic landscape and its enigmas.

It all happens here, under the watchful eye of the Green Man. In the summer months, the pub is a permanent circles convention. Scientists, psychics and circlemakers, ufologists, dogs and pool players; all jostle for space and attention. Everybody drinks a lot.

This year, perhaps as a result of waning interest in the formations themselves, the excitement seems to revolve around paranormal ephemera, particularly the mysterious balls of light (BOLs) seen on so many occasions. Welsh ufologist Matthew Williams was drawn to the area by nearby UFO mecca Rudloe Manor. On the same night that the Lockeridge formation appeared, he caught a glowing cigar-shaped "mothership" on video while he harassed a low-flying military helicopter with a 1.5 million watt spotlight. Nearby two women saw a glowing light float across the road into East Field, where circle-makers traditionally showcase their best designs. This field is currently the location of the year's star turn, a fractal snowflake about 250ft (76m) across.

Although the mothership attracts some scepticism, everybody takes the BOLs seriously, even Rob Irving. It was a sighting over East Field in the early Nineties that first drew him into the circle scene. Photographer Steve Alexander famously filmed one flying over a tractor near Milk Hill in 1990; the driver reported it independently. Centre for the Study of Extra Terrestrial Intelligence (CSETI) leader Steven Greer actually communicated with one in 1992, coincidentally the same night that Irving and Jim Schnabel were flying an illuminated helium balloon. More recently, Colin Andrews shot footage of a BOL pursued by an MoD helicopter, and the infamous Oliver's Castle video hoax purported to show three of them in the act of creating a formation. This year a Nippon TV crew are holding all night vigils, hoping to catch one of the BOLs on time lapse cameras – also long enough to catch human tricksters. Local scenester Lee Winterstone also claimed to have dramatic new BOL footage which we could see later on in his caravan; unfortunately, we arrived late and he was nowhere to be seen.

"IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE THEY'RE ALL REAL, YOU'RE DEAD"

The weekend's main event was happening in and around Alton Barnes' Coronation Hall. We weren't allowed inside to hear any of the talks, but we were able to plead journalistic licence and avoid the £3 charge to enter the neighbouring field. For this we were thankful. Inside was a marquee containing circle memorabilia stalls, tea and fine cakes. A smaller tent housed a Reiki massage parlour while a teepee housed star guest Rod "Cloud Bear" Berry from the States. Apparently Rod was a Native American seer. Definitely American, not so sure about the Native. Seer? Well, who can say.

MEETING THE MAKERS: The "Education Department".

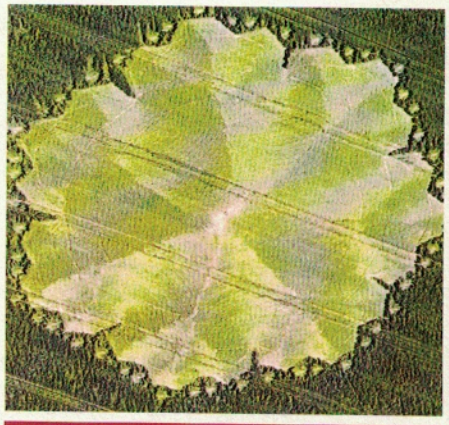
It was inside this field of dreams that things began to turn nasty. Within seconds of entering the marquee, I was quizzed as to my identity. Suspicions were running high. A BBC *Country File* crew seemed to be the source of the upset – word had it that they were in league with the circlemakers. I attempted to quiz one of the crew on this point but she was very busy, though she assured me that everybody was very happy. Well, I was having a fine time anyway.

Back inside, I met Will, a circlemaker of some repute. Immediately likeable with the quiet confidence of one who knows, Will confessed that he'd been addicted to this art for six years making up to 10 formations each season. This year he'd done "a few", though he wasn't going to say which. Mystery, as Irving says, is part of the art. Most of the circlemakers know what other groups are doing but there will always be newcomers and unknowns, as there were this year.

Like many circlemakers, Will has experienced plenty of strangeness. Flashes and balls of light are common, rarer was an apparent column of light that others in his team saw descending from a cloud one night. Though his back was turned, Will did sense a strong metallic taste at the same moment. There have also been premonitions: "I've drawn something and imagined going out later to make it in the field, then found the same pattern already in place, right where I was going to put mine. All the instances of paranormal activity have some element of truth. Then they're built upon, catalysing others".

The circlemakers respect the fact that people find wonder and meaning in their work; sometimes they're even left marvelling at their own creations. But despite the fact that their efforts drive the phenomenon, this respect isn't mutual. Busty Taylor, one of the first to be fascinated by the circles, was not amused. "It would be nice if all this silliness stopped. I don't consider it art; I consider it a bloody nuisance". Although he left the scene after things began to get nasty, he's still a regular down at the Barge. "Nowadays, if you don't believe they're all real, you're dead", he grumbled dejectedly.

Equally unappreciative of the forces behind the phenomenon was Francine Blake who declined to speak at length with me. "It's a matter of wavelength", she explained. Such exceptions aside, most circle enthusiasts are accepting of the circlemakers and their art, happy to admit that some, if not most, formations are the handiwork of human beings such as themselves and not aliens, secret technologies, crop geneticists or divine intervention.



STEVE ALEXANDER

WHEAT-A-TRIX: One of this year's crop of designs.

Later, as the sun sets over the hills beyond the East Field, the faithful gather inside the snowflake and join hands in a "circle of life". Most look old enough to know better. Rod Berry dances and bangs his drum, blessing each in turn with smoke and feathers. They are clearly enjoying the occasion, enraptured in spiritual well-being. Apart from Francine, who turns and scowls as we linger at the tattered edges of the fractal formation. Who, I wonder, are the real hoaxers and what happens if one year the patterns cease to appear?

Special thanks to Ed Davey and Rob Irving.

MARK PILKINGTON; PANORAMIC SHOT BELOW BY ROB IRVING

I GET AROUND: Rob Irving and his 90-second crop circle.

strange deaths

MATTHEW MESSING, 16, was playing ice hockey in Quincy, Massachusetts, one evening in 1995 when an opponent intercepted him with a routine bump to the chest. He collapsed on the ice and died instantly. The incident, along with nearly 70 others reported in recent years, had baffled doctors. In each case, they found no injury to the heart and no previous heart condition in the victims. Now the explanation for the rare deaths, which go by the medical name of *commotio cordis* – concussion of the heart – may have been found. Dr Gregory Curfman and others suggest that the deaths result from an unusual conjunction of events. When the heart is beating, there is a fleeting moment, about a hundredth of a second long, when the electrical rhythm is resetting, so to speak, just before a beat. During that moment, if a moderate blow is directed to exactly the spot on the chest above the heart, the electrical rhythm breaks and the heart stops beating, fibrillating ineffectively. If the blow is too strong or too weak, or the timing is a few milliseconds off, death is averted. *The New England Journal of Medicine, Vol 338, No 25, 18th June 1998.*

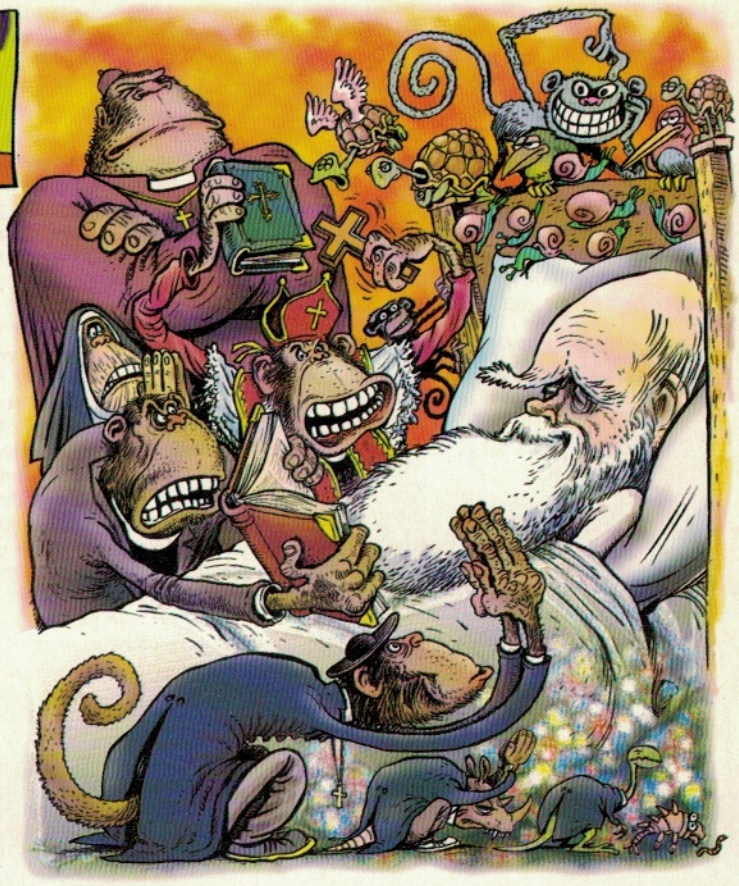
HAILSTONES UP TO 7.5cm (3in) fell on the Chinese province of Jiangxi on 22 April, leaving 12 people dead and 1,000 injured. The following day, hailstones up to 8cm (3.1in) in diameter pounded the city of Changde in northern Hunan province, killing a further nine people as well as demolishing houses and flattening crops. *Hong Kong Standard, 26 April 1998.*

AN AUSTRALIAN MIME collapsed and died from a massive heart attack during a performance at a Canadian street performers' festival as 300 stunned spectators watched in horror. Wayne Condo, a 45-year-old mime from Melbourne, Australia, was midway through his last show on 13 July at the Edmonton International Street Performers Festival when he suddenly fell to the ground and lay motionless. Initially, people thought it was part of his act; but when they realised something was wrong, they tried to resuscitate him. Rushed to a nearby hospital, he was pronounced dead the next day. *Infobeat, 16 July 1998.*

PATRICIA NOSIGLIA, 22, died on 26 May after she picked up her phone receiver in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and received a 13,000-volt shock that knocked her to the floor. Police said the shock was caused by an electric cable that crossed the telephone line running from the street to the house. *[AP] 28 May 1998.*

MYTH CONCEPTIONS

HUNT EMERSON & MAT COWARD



DARWIN'S DEATHBED CONVERSION

THE BACKGROUND

Many Christians – even those who, along with their churches, accept Darwin's theories of natural selection – take wry comfort from this widely believed story. All right, so it doesn't really undermine *The Origin of Species*, but it does at least suggest that rationalism cannot take the place of faith in the life of even the most celebrated scientist.

THE "TRUTH"

Charles Darwin died in April 1882. Within weeks, stories about his final words were circulating orally amongst his opponents. In 1993, the Darwin biographer James Moore counted more than 100 written examples of the deathbed conversion legend, and said that wherever he lectured on Darwin, the conversion question invariably came up. Moore also points out that Darwin was not the only subject of this myth: he lists numerous "famous freethinkers" who are all "rumoured to have seen the light before they died".

Moore identifies as the main author of the Darwin story an evangelist named Lady Hope who, in 1915, claimed to have been a friend of Darwin, and to have visited him during his last days, when she found him reading the Scriptures, for which he "expressed the greatest reverence".

The Hope tale, in its entirety, was categorically denied on many occasions by Darwin's intimates. Beyond Hope's own account, there seems to be no evidence for it at all. In his autobiography, not published in full until 1958, Darwin famously wrote that "disbelief crept over me at a very slow rate, but was at last complete" and that he had "never since doubted even for a single second that my conclusion was correct".

SOURCES

Colin McCall dealt with this matter fully and methodically in a review (in the May 1995 issue of The Freethinker*) of James Moore's book* The Darwin Legend.

DISCLAIMER

Truth evolves, and many believe it to be descended from slippery sea creatures. If you have any species of information to add to this story, send it to *FT* where we will do our best not to suppress it.

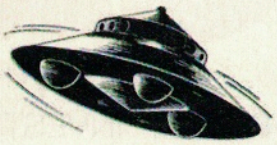
MYTHCHASER

Remember that bloke who turned orange and died from drinking too much carrot juice? Well, did he really? Die that is; or turn orange. I'd be most refreshed to hear from anyone who can add some fibre to this Well-Known Fact. MatCoward, MatCoward@aol.com

PERKY PAT'S UFO SELECTION

EXCELLENT PRINTS ON QUALITY SHIRTS

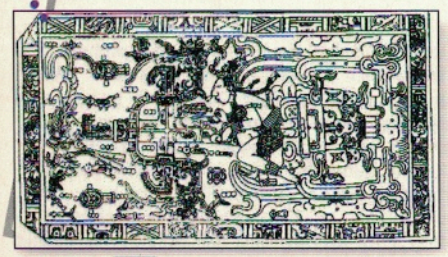
AMAZING STORIES

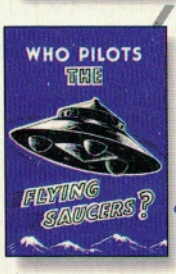


FLYING SAUCER in BLACK or GLOW IN THE DARK PINK

50'S SAUCER

MAYAN SPACEMAN





WHO PILOTS THE FLYING SAUCERS?

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HUMDINGER

IN THE NOT-SO-QUIET COUNTRYSIDE, **JOHN BILLINGSLEY** INVESTIGATES A PHENOMENON THAT SEEMS MONOTONOUS BUT IS FAR FROM HUMDRUM. PHOTOS BY **ALEX HOWE**. ILLUSTRATIONS BY **JONATHAN EDWARDS**.

You're walking across a moor on a hot summer's day: hardly a blade of grass stirs. And then you become aware of a strange buzzing sound. Assuming it to be the pleasant and relaxing sound of bees at work, you walk on. Then it gets louder and more intense. There seem to be quite a number of bees or wasps, and they don't sound quite so relaxed. You look around for the nest that you might have disturbed or the swarm that's gathering, but you don't see anything and the noise doesn't go away. Eventually, feeling rather disturbed, you move on, putting the buzz behind you. You may assume that it was a wasps' nest or bee swarm that you had overlooked, but it's worth bearing in mind that you may have just come across the hummadruz.

What on Earth is the hummadruz? Most reports speak of a buzz, a few of bells. Still others describe the sound as a hum or a drone. This ambiguity is what led to the term 'hummadruz' being first coined in the 19th century, after a small flurry of reports in the Manchester area. Even as far back as 1769 Gilbert White recorded in *The Natural History of Selborne* (in Dorset): "Humming in the air. There is a natural occurrence to be met with upon the highest part of our downs in hot summer days... a loud humming as of bees in the air, though not one insect is to be seen. The sound is distinctly to be heard the whole common through. Any person would suppose that a large swarm of bees was in motion and playing about his head." Theories range from (presumably invisible) swarms of insects to vibrating gas pipelines, from microwaves to tinnitus. It often causes some distress, perhaps because of the association with angry bees or because of the tone of the noise. Not everyone is disturbed by it, however.

Plenty of people have gone on record as thinking they were hearing bees. Andy Norfolk and friends assumed bees in their experience of the hummadruz in Cornwall in July 1997.[1] A month later, a couple from Chapel-en-le-Frith looked for wasps' nests to explain the buzz at Solomon's Temple above Poole's Cavern in Buxton. The Hannahs were sure they had stumbled on an underground hive on the Isle of Arran.[2]

Another reported variant, unearthed by Andy Norfolk, is more musical – more like one of Shakespeare's 'sweet airs'. John Merron's early buzz at White Sheet Hill, or Allt-yr-Ancr, near Meifod in Wales, sounded "like an enormous swarm of bees". His first reaction was panic, but his companion told him it was the music of the 'Perpetual Choirs', the circle of sites put forward by John Michell in *The City of Revelation*.[3]

YOU BECOME AWARE OF A BUZZING SOUND AND THEN IT GETS LOUDER AND MORE INTENSE

The sound of bells preceded a visionary experience by George Russell, who wrote at the turn of the century under the pen-name Æ: "I had been listening to music in the air, and what seemed to be the sound of bells..." when a fairy host appeared. Maurice Hewlett saw "a great assembling of Oreads" (hill-spirits) dancing in a ring near Chesilbury Camp, where a year earlier he had heard the hummadruz.[4] Their experiences were rather more pleasant than that of the greedy old man of St Just in Cornwall, who, according to folklore, was attracted to a fairy feast by their marvellous music only to be frightened away when the music stopped and a huge bee-like buzz swarmed in its place.

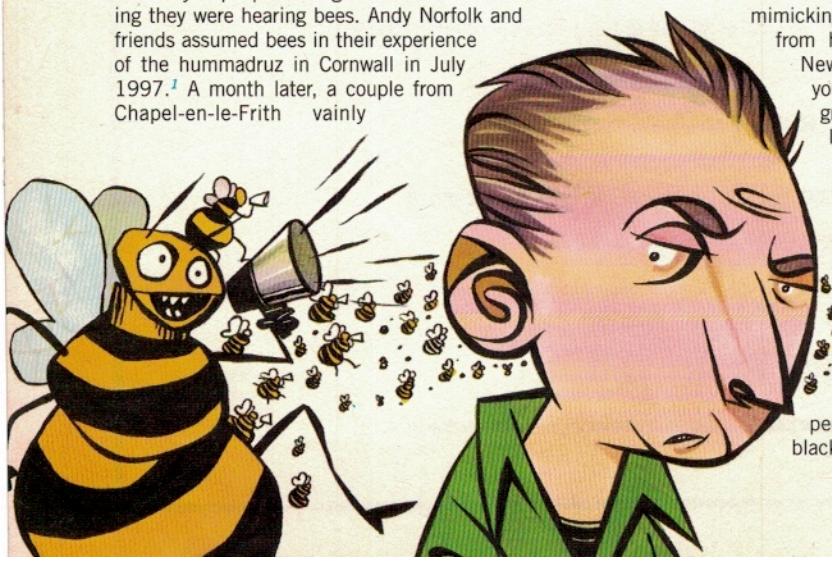
The folklorist Katherine Briggs noted a humming sound reported in the vicinity of fairy rings in her book *The Vanishing People*.[5] And was it the fairies that the mysterious 'sweepers' of some Pennine districts were mimicking when they went from house to house at New Year? "Outside you hear a faint noise, gradually becoming louder, till it sounds as if a swarm of bees is gathering outside in the darkness. Suddenly the door opens and in steps a group of half-a-dozen or so people, their faces blacked to make them unrecognisable, the men dressed as women, and the women dressed as men with their jackets pulled inside-out. Each carries a broom and, ignoring the members of the household, they sweep around the room, and especially the hearth, humming all the while. When they have finished their cleaning job one of them holds out a purse in which you put a few coppers and they leave for their next call without having said a word."[6]

The weather associated with hummadruz experiences is usually described as being hot. The Manchester correspondents of last century added that it occurred on calm and clear days.[7] Hot and relatively still weather is a constant in the accounts from Halifax, Cornwall, Buxton, the Yorkshire Dales, the Isle of Arran and the various locations in Wales where hummadruz has been reported.

Gilbert White's description is so similar to the experiences reported in more recent years that there can be no doubt that the hummadruz has a history. Moreover, he describes it in such a tone as to imply that it was not an exceptionally unusual occurrence. When the earth mysteries magazine *Northern Earth* ran a two-part feature on it in 1997, they got a greater response from readers than on any other topic in their 18-year history.[8] This is perhaps not surprising, since the hummadruz often seems to occur near ancient sites; perhaps this would also support the fairy connection.

Other similar sounds at ancient sites are a ticking and humming near The Whispering Knights (near the Rollright Stones), a hum from a Bronze Age cairn in the Wicklow Mountains of Ireland, and a buzz from Arthur's Stone, near Dorstone in Herefordshire.[9] As Shakespeare wrote in *The Tempest*, "the isle is full of noises, sounds and sweet airs..." and the hummadruz offers a fair share of these.

Orthodox explanations include Low Frequency Noise (LFN) sensitivity, electromagnetic pollution, vibration in gas pipelines and tinnitus. It would, however, be difficult to imagine Gilbert White being affected by most of these 200 years ago. Against the orthodox theories, we have the Perpetual Choirs, fairy music, the sound of the Earth turning, the 'friction of shimmering air', UFO hum, the music of the spheres, and 'ley' energy. There is no doubt on which side poetry lies, but do the suggested material causes have any substance?

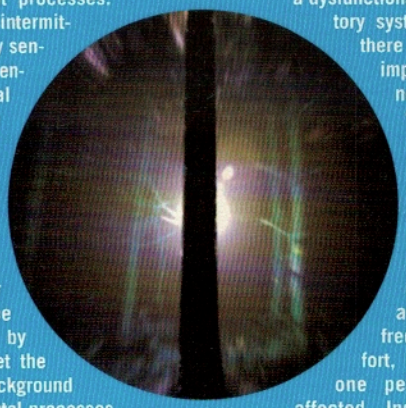


ALL PHOTOS: ALEX HOWE/IMAGE MANIPULATION: ETIENNE GILFILLAN

HEAR, HEAR

Is the hummadruz perhaps a result of hearing problems, rather than merely a sound in its own right?

Tinnitus, usually thought to be an effect of ageing, stress or exposure to loud noise, generally begins as a high-pitched buzz in the ears, mostly perceived when the environment is quiet and still. It often goes no further than this, but can develop into a persistent and intrusive hum, buzz and/or other noise (including bells) which intrudes upon everyday life and interferes with concentration and thought processes. Continuous rather than intermittent, it is a real auditory sensation, apparently independent of actual external sound (which people can be 'trained' to disregard).



Tinnitus groups have found that the sounds of nature can be particularly efficacious in curing or reducing the nuisance level of the ailment – by training sufferers to let the noise blend in with background sound, its effect on mental processes is reduced. One group in Hull notes that listening to natural sounds – such as waves lapping on a beach – which have been set at a similar volume to the tinnitus somehow pegs the two sound stimuli together. "If you start with the sound about the level of tinnitus, over the weeks and months you can slowly reduce the sound level and curiously the level of the tinnitus drops with it", explained Bill Howard. Perhaps significantly, their main problem has been finding somewhere quiet enough for only natural sounds to be recorded, which suggests that there is already severe disruption in the silence/noise ratio even in rural environments.

Some hearing specialists suggest tinnitus may be a 'survival reflex' inherited from our hunting days, with the brain latching on to some small and inconsequential sound and insisting that it matters. Others describe it as a dysfunctional response of the auditory system – even in silence there is a constant flow of impulses arriving at the nerves of the ear and if 'normal silence' is not present then the brain can misinterpret the pattern it receives as sound.

Tinnitus is a common hearing disorder nowadays, and may account for much low-frequency noise discomfort, especially where only one person appears to be affected. Indeed, electromagnetic pollution may actually create a hypersensitivity to sound or certain wavelengths that may subsequently manifest as tinnitus.

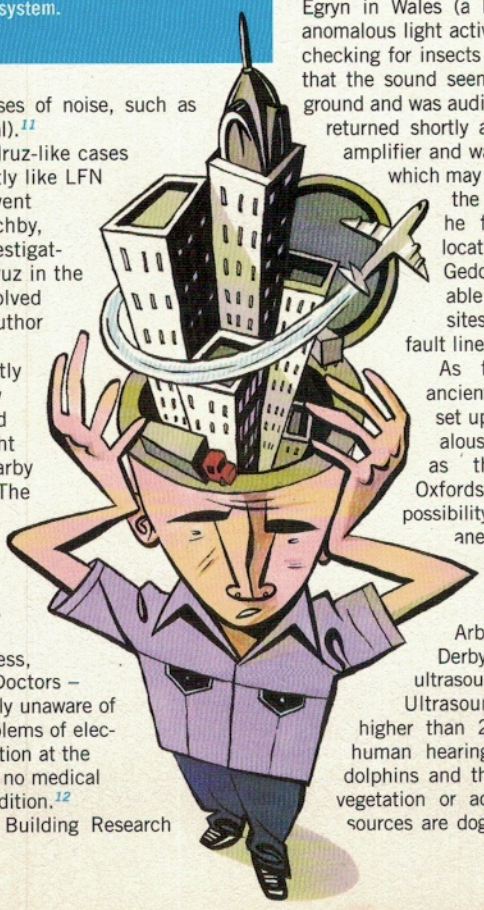
Should you suspect a hummadruz and can maintain your cool in the usually hot conditions, you might wish to cover your ears. If the sound gets quieter, it's external, but if it gets louder, then it's internal. In that case, it could be tinnitus or even a sound emitted from the vascular system.

The Low Frequency Noise Sufferers' Association lays the blame for its members' discomfort at the door of industrial sources, though it has not ruled out "other phenomena which are not yet understood".[10] Many members feel that the gas grid is the main source of LFN; one pipe in Wales is apparently 'set off' by small earth tremors and similar 'seismic' effects may occur from pump or valve operations.

LFN may indeed have some relation to the hummadruz. Though the sound in the head is small, its incongruity alerts the brain to perceive it more strongly. The 'sound' may not be externally present, but the stimulus on the nerve endings is enough in certain circumstances to disrupt the expected auditory pattern. Hence, hummadruz hearers are not necessarily hearing a hum or buzz *per se*, but picking up through their sound sense on some other abnormality in the sensory environment. This abnormality could be some kind of energy (not necessarily unknown or mysterious) normally present in the environment but perceived more strongly under certain atmospheric conditions.

In modern-day hearers, at least, it could also be a response conditioned by the omission of silence from the contemporary pattern of auditory environments. The 1995 'tranquillity survey' of the Council for the Protection of Rural England found a 60% drop since World War II in places in England that could be described as tranquil (free from certain classes of noise, such as road and industrial).[11]

Some hummadruz-like cases do sound distinctly like LFN problems. One event found by Sid Birchby, when he was investigating the hummadruz in the early 1970s, involved the wife of the author Edward Hyams. She was apparently troubled by a low hum in 1960 and suspected it might be to do with nearby telegraph wires. The telephone company actually removed her telephone and slackened cables in an attempt to remedy her distress, but to no avail. Doctors – who were generally unaware of the potential problems of electromagnetic pollution at the time – could find no medical cause for her condition.[12]



In 1992, the Building Research Establishment (BRE) was commissioned to investigate a number of LFN complaints. Respondents to their questionnaire likened the sound they heard to droning, distant planes, lorries, motor hum, hissing, whining and similar noises. The survey was apparently entirely concerned with noise experienced indoors; one case investigated was of a noise around 104Hz, audible inside the house but not outside. Other measured sounds were consistent with the 100Hz hum emitted by electricity sub-stations. In a number of cases it was thought that the complainant had been sensitised to an intermittent noise by some past experience of it, and remained unusually aware of similar frequencies. The nature and diagnosis of the noises complained about seem to confirm the suspicion that a distinction needs to be made between the hummadruz and the growing incidence of electrically-related LFN hums.[13]

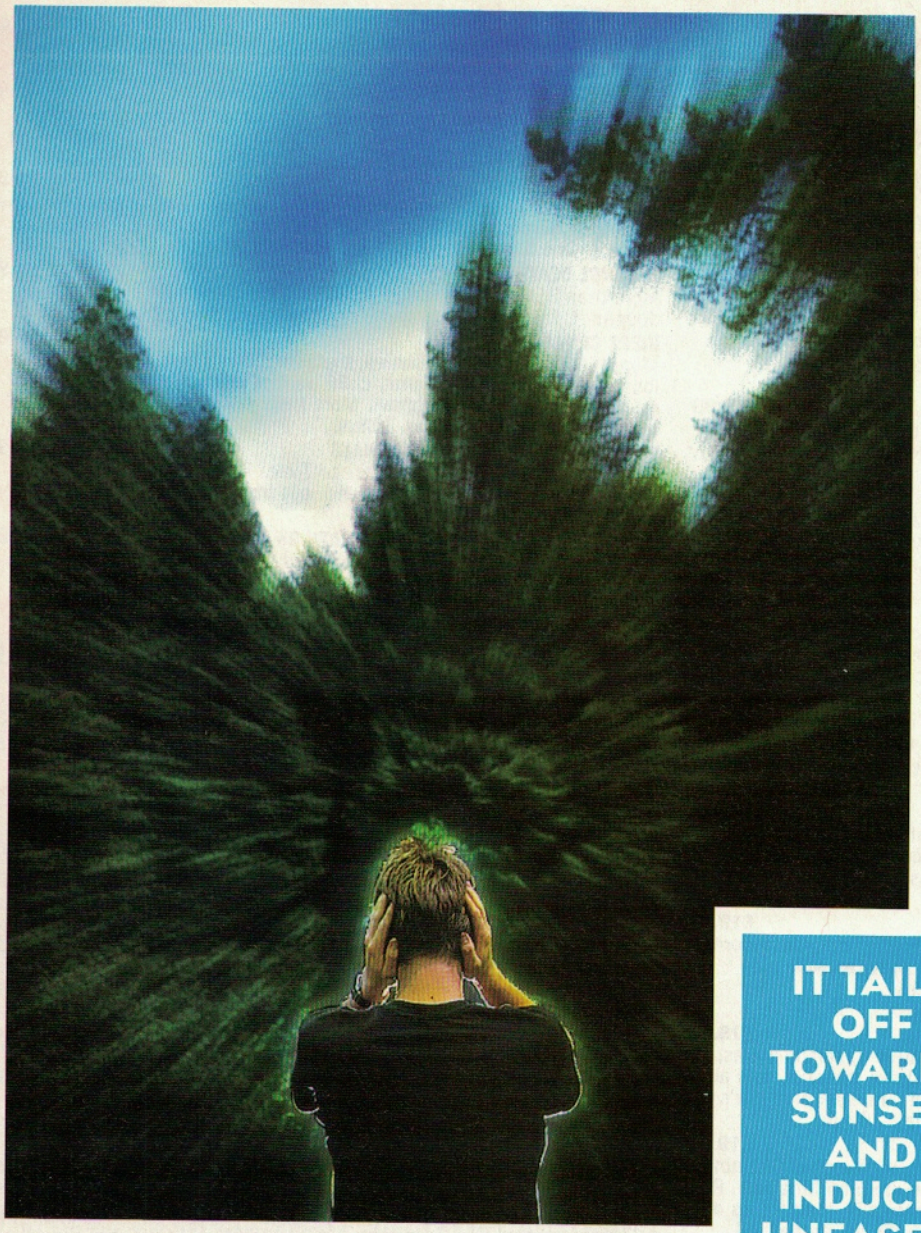
A particularly virulent example of these annoyances has been the Largs Hum, heard by a number of people in Ayrshire over several years in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Typically, it was worse at night and sounded like a 'pulsing throb' to those who could hear it. The favourite candidate for the origin was the radar of submarines using the Holy Loch naval base.[14] The GCHQ 'spy centre' near Cheltenham in Gloucestershire was blamed for a local 'hum flap' in 1992.[15]

A seismic origin has been suspected for some noises. Comrie in Perthshire experienced 430 earth tremors over 38 years in the 19th century, many accompanied by sounds like 'rumbling in the earth' or 'a moaning sound in the air'. We can presumably discount gas pipelines in this case. The seismic connection leads us to the phenomena associated with 'earth lights' – anomalous lights that Paul Devereux and others indicate may be connected with movement at fault lines.[16]

Some support for a link with the kind of faulted landscape responsible for earth lights and UFO experiences is offered by Maurice Giffin's work. He encountered a sound like a swarm of bees on the Llawlech Ridge above the village of Egryn in Wales (a location well known for its anomalous light activity early this century). After checking for insects and finding none, he noted that the sound seemed to be coming from the ground and was audible for up to 98ft (30m). He returned shortly afterwards with a low noise amplifier and was able to record the sound, which may be the first aural evidence of the hummadruz. Two years later, he found two more humming locations in Wales, at Cors y Gedol and Cell Fawr, and was able to establish that all three sites were close to an area of fault lines.[17]

As for the connection with ancient sites, the Dragon Project, set up to seek and monitor anomalous effects at ancient sites such as the Rollright Stones in Oxfordshire, was alerted to the possibility of ultrasonic emissions by anecdotes. These included a bat detector registering at an otherwise bat-free ancient site, and skylarks enjoying Arbor Low stone circle in Derbyshire because of the local ultrasound!

Ultrasound occurs at frequencies higher than 20kHz, the normal limit of human hearing. It is produced by bats, dolphins and the wind as it blows through vegetation or across sand; strong artificial sources are dog whistles, jangling keys and



even plastic carrier bags. At the other end of the spectrum is low-frequency infrasound. Either may be produced by certain tectonic movements, and either type of sound may also be involved in the hummadruz experience.

The point about these frequencies is that they are not generally audible, though the possibility exists that some other factor could bring the sound into the conscious human range temporarily. Just as dowsing appears to reveal that we respond to signals that our conscious brains do not register, audiological experiments imply that we are subconsciously aware of a far higher range of sound than we actually hear.

Although strong indications of ultrasound were found at the Rollright Stones and elsewhere, it occurred only sporadically and was generally inconclusive. Moreover, ultrasound did not occur during summer, which conflicts with hummadruz preferences.[18]

Maurice Giffin's research not only linked his Welsh hummadruz experiences with fault lines, it also indicated that the noises were only audible from mid-May to mid-September, on calm sunny days with a light breeze at most. In addition, the sound faded as evening approached, as happened at the Halifax well where I heard the buzz. He further noted that the sound occurred close to the 886ft (270m) contour; Andy Norfolk and his friends heard it at 728ft (222m).

Possibly the oddest of hummadruz experiences was reported from the remnant of the Somme battlefield preserved in Picardy, France. On a hot June afternoon in 1990, Nick and Carol Ford encountered an intimidating buzz while walking across 'No Man's Land'. Simultaneously, one of them felt a growing panic. The sound seemed to come from under their feet and led them to look for underground wasps' nests – no insects were visible above ground. The sound was only audible in the despoiled land between the trenches. The Fords also noted that their faces and hands were "prickling, with a feeling like pins and needles" and that the palms of their hands were mottled – "a phenomenon of static electricity that we have learned to associate with strongly negatively-ionised atmospheres, usually at megalithic sites and around altars in old churches."[19]

IT TAILS OFF TOWARDS SUNSET AND INDUCES UNEASE IN MOST HEARERS

For all the variety of experiences and theories, there is a consistency to the hummadruz. It is a low-frequency sound, sometimes perceived to be under the ground, most often sounding like a swarm of bees. It occurs on hot, still days in spring and summer, tails off towards sunset and prefers upland zones. It also induces a certain amount of unease in most hearers. Less typical characteristics include the vicinity of prehistoric or numinous sites, green roads, or fault lines. By association, the possibility exists of a link with earth lights. The true hummadruz would appear to be of 'natural' origin, rather than an effect of modern technology.

On the other hand, the reports suggest that some experiences can be ruled out as hummadruz-related and should be seen as a modern health hazard arising from electronic pollution. I would suggest that this include all sounds heard inside buildings. I suspect that these buzzes and hums are to do with structures amplifying internal or external sound or other waves, possibly activating on a harmonic level. 'Electro-stress', particularly microwaves (which have been implicated by Albert Budden in allergies and abduction scenarios[20]), affects our senses in ways that are not yet appreciated (including tingling 'pins and needles' sensations), and its potential to cause resonant vibration in our ears cannot be dismissed.[21] Microwaves, however, are highly directional, whereas the hummadruz seems to be more ambient.

One piece of research that may indicate a natural electromagnetic cause for the hummadruz was carried out by C S Hay, who has taken a number of audio readings in topsoil around the country. Frequencies within the range 100Hz to 10000Hz and sine waves from 500Hz to 3.60kHz have been registered, and these are frequently intermodulated – the two signals affecting each other, creating distortion. Mr Hay also noted that this intermodulation seemed to disturb "the few people who were able to hear the sounds".[22]

So if you get a buzz out of the countryside, look around you. If you can see no insects, wires or microwave towers, don't panic – it's just the hummadruz.

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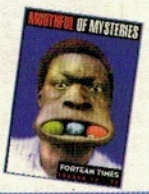

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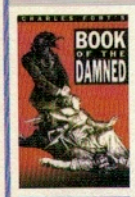

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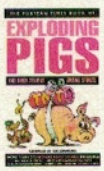

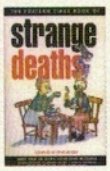

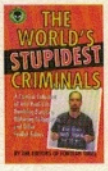

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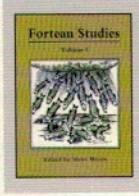

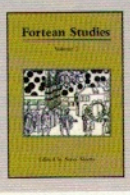

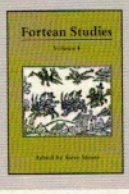

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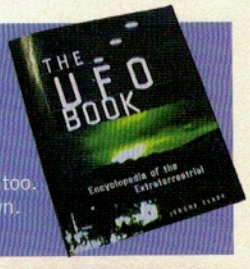

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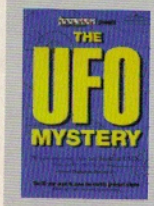

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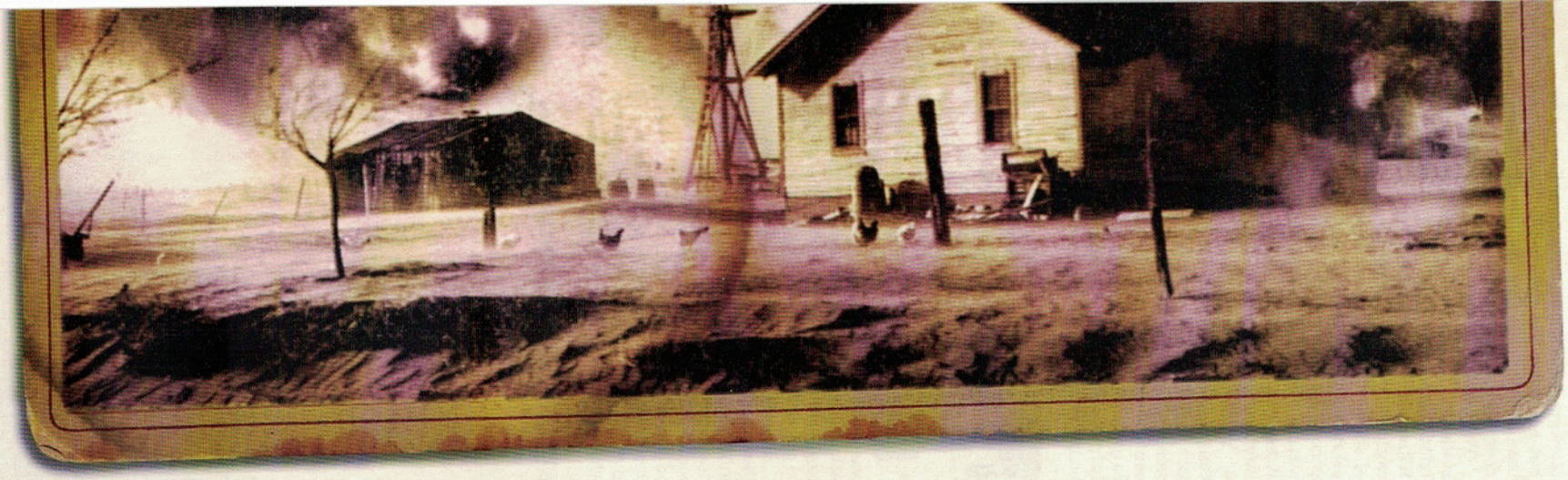
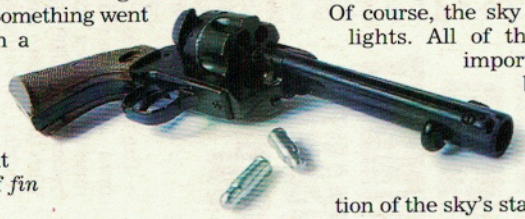
ONCE UPON A TIME IN AURORA



HULTON GETTY/BALDWIN/GILFILLAN

Fifty years before the Roswell crash – before 'UFOs' were even invented – there was the mother of all social panics: the great American airship mystery. In 1896 and the following year, unusual craft were cruising the skies from coast to coast, powered by eerily silent engines and projecting powerful beams of light. One Spring morning in 1897 one of these enigmas visited Aurora, Texas. Something went wrong; it lost altitude, collided with a windmill and exploded in flames; its dead pilot was interred in the town graveyard. This momentous event – possibly the first alien to be buried on Earth – went almost unnoticed in the welter of *fin de siècle* events.

By the 1890s, a century of war and philosophical upheaval had drained Europe's spirit like a succubus. After subduing a continent and surviving a bloody civil war, America dreamt uneasily during that long decade. Americans, especially in the Southwest, were still frontier people, with all the plainness and republican virtue that that term suggests. They were also mainly Protestants and therefore less given over to signs and wonders than their Catholic counterparts. But now, Protestant or no, they were reporting visions straight out of the book of Ezekiel. While the European imagination was bedevilled by every variety of virago, gnome, fairy and vampire – a virtual census-taking of the underworld – Americans were reporting manifestations from the other end of the cosmic spectrum: lights in the sky.



LISA ANDERS

Of course, the sky already has a full complement of lights. All of them are charged with numinous import, since the vault of heaven always bears human projections of divine order. Words like heavenly, celestial, and cosmic reflect the conceptual twinning of these realms. Traditionally, any disruption of the sky's stately progress – an eclipse, comet, or shooting star – is taken as a portent of the most serious kind. For Christians, any disruption of the sky's stately progress – an eclipse, comet, or shooting star – is taken as a portent of the most serious kind. For Christians, ever mindful of Bethlehem, lights in the sky were often a prelude to spiritual initiation. And now the New World had added, to the enumeration of fixed stars, a mysterious visitor.

WRITTEN BY
JEFF GORVETZIAN

ILLUSTRATED BY
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AIRSHIP RENDERED BY
JONATHAN BALDWIN

IMAGES MANIPULATED BY
ETIENNE GILFILLAN

PRESENTED TO YOU BY FORTEAN TIMES IN FULL CINEMASCOPE

At the twilight of the 19th century, while Europe sought helplessly to drive out its demons, or summon them, in glittering salons and drawing rooms, the rage of North Texas society was the nightly lawn party. Neighbours would gather at dusk and sit together, drinking tea and lemonade, pleasantly holding forth on the issues of the day. At times, they would lapse into hushed anticipation, watching the skies. For some, the sign in the heavens they awaited bespoke our first contact with other worlds. To others, it meant this great Age of Machines had finally taken to the air, a region previously reserved for eagles, whirlwinds and angels. But few doubted; the visitor had already appeared in nearly 20 other Texas cities and, before that, all across the United States.

17 November 1896 was a dark and stormy night (really) in Sacramento, but conditions were clear enough for almost 100 residents to make out a novel sight: a bright light, several hundred feet off the ground, moving in a slow but deliberate path across the sky. Though hot air balloons had been in use for almost a century, powered flight, in the sense of planes or zeppelins, was still almost a decade away. The next day's headline announced alleged sightings of an "airship", helpfully adding that those who had come forward with the story were "not addicted to prevarication".

The airship reappeared five days later, witnessed this time by thousands of people, including a sheriff and district attorney. It took a leisurely 30 minutes to cross the city. That same night it also appeared in San Francisco, where it buzzed the Cliff House, supposedly frightening the seals off their rocks. Over the next week, reports came in from Washington and Canada, and as the great airship slowly crossed the continent, west to east, it left in its wake a trail of breathless newspaper accounts. By February of 1897, Texas, Nebraska, Iowa and Missouri were all reporting sightings, though the airship was now assuming a variety of guises. Still, most reports featured the same cigar shaped flying object. Silvery, and perhaps 60ft (18m) in length, it moved silently through the sky with a powerful searchlight at one end. One reporter lyrically dubbed it "The Flying Dutchman of the Clouds".

THE AIRSHIP REAPPEARED WITNESSED THIS TIME BY THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE

Airship mania peaked in April, as the wave of sightings neared the city of Chicago. That month, the first and only photograph of the great airship was taken, though, as far as I can tell, no final judgement was made on its authenticity. Then, on 15 April, the first report of the airship's destruction came in from Kalamazoo, Michigan. Two days later, a second report of the airship's destruction came from Aurora, a small town in north Texas. Sightings continued, but after just a few days, statewide reports of the "mysterious flying objects" had stopped.

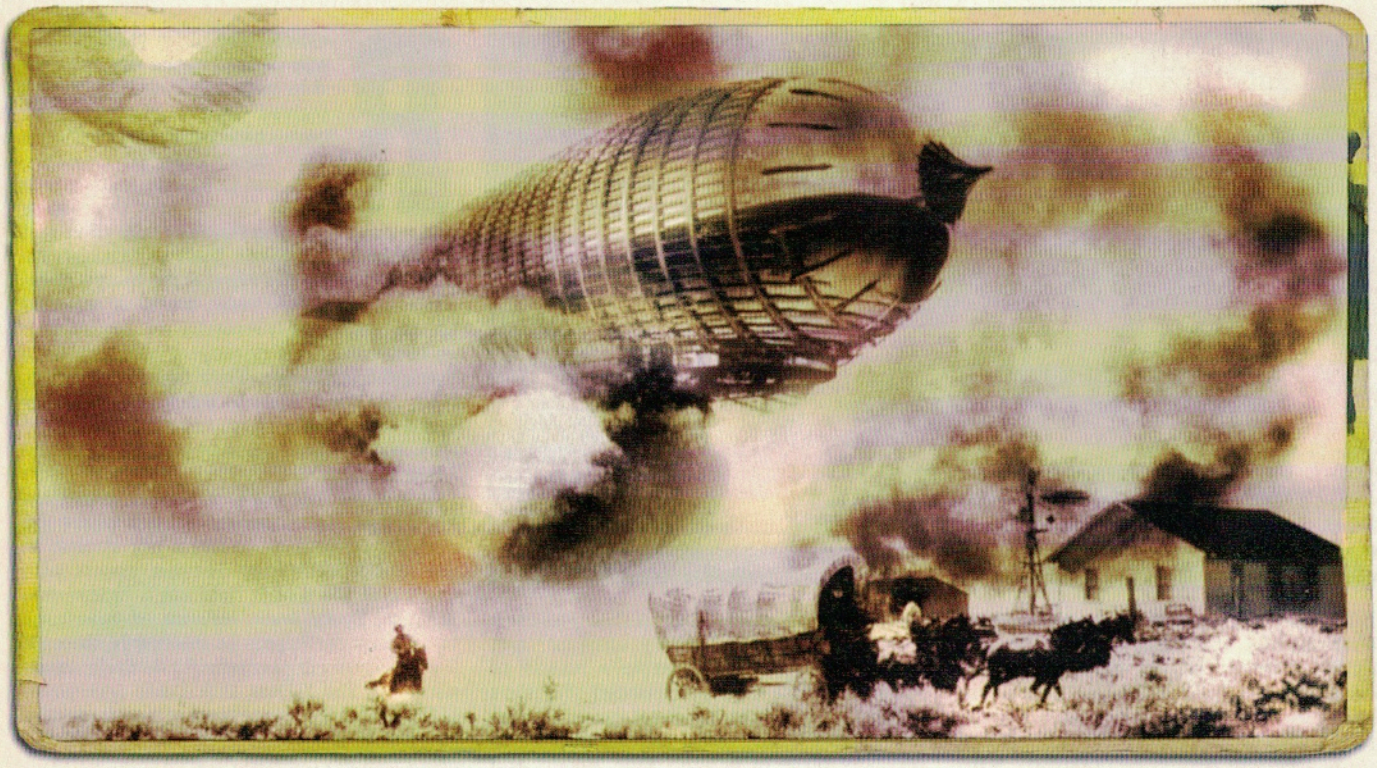
The modern saucer craze is usually dated from 1947, when Kenneth Arnold spotted nine shiny discs, flying formation at speeds better than 1,200 miles (1,900km) per hour. With the modern saucers came the 'extraterrestrial hypothesis', which gave these mysterious visitors a local habitation and a name. This was not the case in 1897, when ETs were one contestant among many in the race for an explanation. Some held mischievous telegraphers to blame. Others, perhaps in anticipation of the Spanish American War, swore the craft was piloted by Spaniards, whose singing they claimed to hear. Mindful of the ever-accelerating pace of technological development, many felt a "mysterious inventor" was responsible for the airship, and at least two California attorneys claimed to represent him. The editors of the *Dallas Morning News* were partisans of this theory, but held that the ship came from a secret base at the North Pole. No mention of reindeer was made.

The great airship craze of the 1890s affords students of folklore and myth an unparalleled opportunity to study, in Richard Wilbur's phrase, "at what cross-purposes the world is dreamt". With the possible exception of abduction, it contains in embryonic form every theme present in our own century's encounter with UFOs. Indeed, even the bizarre motif of 'cattle mutilations' was prefigured in the airship craze; for example the infamous fake story of Alexander Hamilton of Yates Center, Kansas, who claimed he caught the great airship with a rope around one of his prize calves [***FT20; 5–7***]. There were other stories that will strike the 20th century ear. How the great airship had fallen to earth and exploded, how something entirely unexpected had happened in Aurora: a body had been pulled from the wreckage.

The *Dallas Morning News* account places the airship in Aurora early on the morning of 17 April. It was travelling due north, but observers could see that something was wrong. The majestic ship was making only 10 or 12 miles (16–19km) per hour, and was gradually "settling toward the earth". After passing the public square, it struck the tower of Judge Proctor's windmill and "went to pieces with a terrific explosion".

A badly disfigured body was pulled from the wreckage, and pronounced "not an inhabitant of this world". After a brief discussion of the ship's composition, the account ends with a simple notice: "the pilot's funeral will take place at noon tomorrow". The corespondent's name is given as S E Heydon, a local businessman who had lost his wife to spotted fever. The

HULTON GETTY/BALDWIN/GILFILLAN



RONALD GRANT ARCHIVE/HULTON GETTY/BALDWIN/GILFILLAN

epidemic had also blinded one of his boys, and crippled the other for life.

Here we pass over neatly to myth. The pilot's body was interred under a gnarled old oak on the cemetery's south side, with a single stone bearing a hieroglyphic inscription from the ship to mark the grave. Though many later said Heydon had fabricated the story to drum up interest in Aurora, there was no further news from the city. Neither the crash nor the gravesite was the subject of publicity. The stone, the town, and the pilot (if there had ever been one) all slept in silence for almost 70 years, exactly as villages in fairy tales are said to do.

On 4 January 1967, Frank Tolbert, a *Dallas Morning News* columnist, received a clipping from his own newspaper in the mail. The clipping, sent by someone with the suggestive name of Byron Cain, was a copy of an article from 1897. It told the fantastic story of a saucer crash in Aurora, Texas. Tolbert, who was also a Texas historian, decided to re-open the case, though the Aurora angle interested him far less than the airship phenomenon as a whole.

HE WAS SURE HE WOULD FIND THE REMAINS OF A VISITOR FROM SPACE

The airship, he firmly held, was the work of bored radio telegraphers who had gained credibility by enticing Joseph Sculley to join their ranks. 'Truthful Sculley', a Fort Worth railroad conductor for the Texas and Pacific line, had a reputation for honesty comparable to George Washington's. It stretched "from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico" and people generally agreed that "his word was as good as a goldmine". Tolbert produced Ray Henderson, a Dallas nonagenarian and former railroad man, to attest that the airship was a well planned hoax joined in by radio men all over the nation.

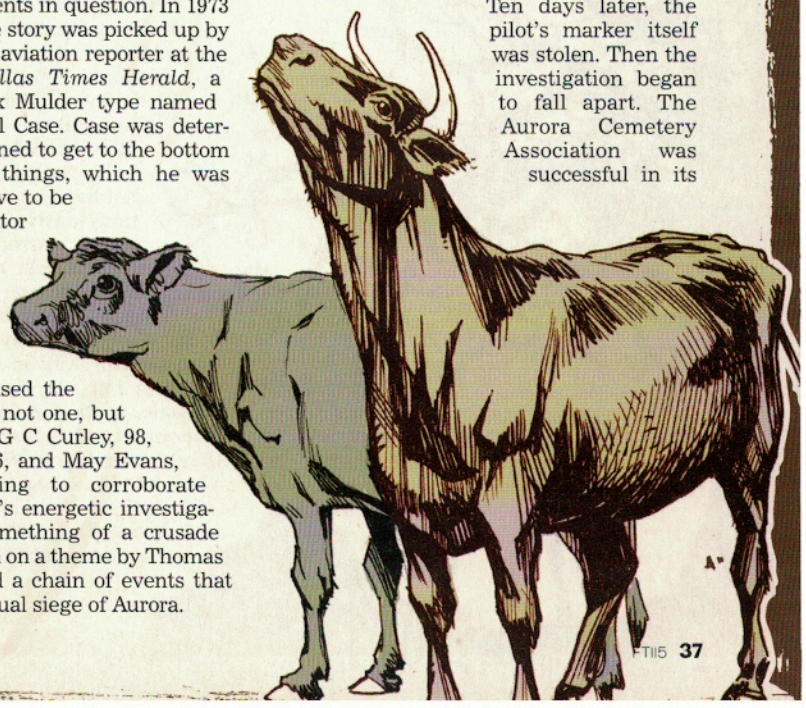
Tolbert returned to the airship story and the little town of Aurora many times over the years, and as is often the case, he softened towards the material that had held his interest for so long. By the early Seventies he was arguing the reverse of his original case, claiming that "many reputable people" and not merely members of railroad crews, had been seeing strange lights. An account involving "40 folks in Plymouth, Indiana" especially impressed him. His last columns about Aurora and the airship asked readers to consider the sheer numbers of ordinary people who claimed to have seen something sailing the skies those many years ago.

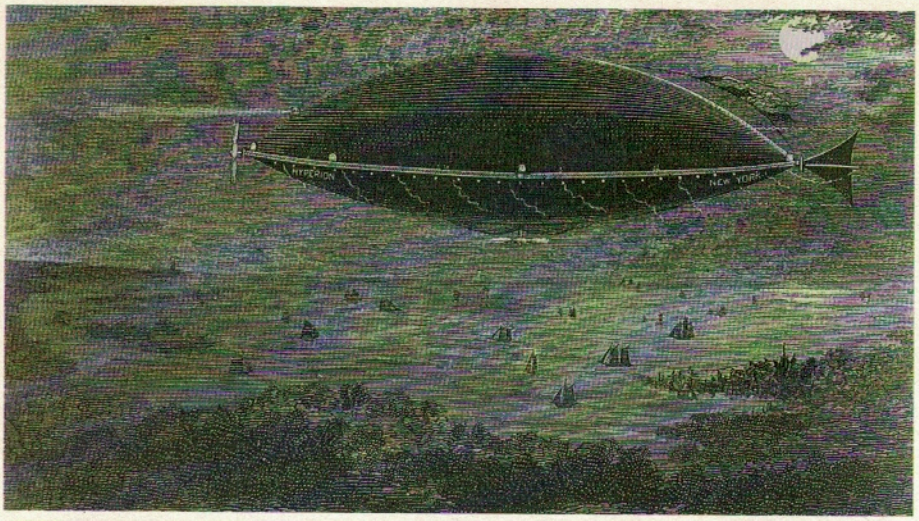
Tolbert's investigation had been the first of any kind into Aurora since Heydon's original report was filed, but still it was the inquiry of a gentleman scholar, who was not overly vexed by the truth or falsity of the events in question. In 1973 the story was picked up by an aviation reporter at the *Dallas Times Herald*, a Fox Mulder type named Bill Case. Case was determined to get to the bottom of things, which he was quite sure would prove to be the remains of a visitor from outer space.

Tolbert had made his opening arguments with a living witness to history, Ray Henderson. Case raised the stakes by producing not one, but three eyewitnesses: G C Curley, 98, Charlie Stephens, 86, and May Evans, 91. All were willing to corroborate Heydon's story. Case's energetic investigation had become something of a crusade and, as if in a fantasia on a theme by Thomas Pynchon, it heralded a chain of events that would result in a virtual siege of Aurora.

The English and Italian media sent film crews. The Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) and the International UFO Bureau (UFOB) had already arrived in full force. While UFOB swamped the Wise County courthouse with demands for the exhumation of the gravesite, their MUFON counterparts swept the city with metal detectors like a horde of crazed coin hunters. Metal samples were forwarded to labs across the nation for analysis. By mid-April 1973, over 20 graves in the Aurora cemetery had been disturbed, some with their markers stolen, and in May residents were standing a nightly vigil to prevent illegal exhumations.

Early July 1973 brought a startling announcement from MUFON: the pilot's grave had been robbed. Before, the grave had shown a 'signature' that was consistent with metal fragments retrieved from the crash site. Now there was "no metal response" from the grave. Ten days later, the pilot's marker itself was stolen. Then the investigation began to fall apart. The Aurora Cemetery Association was successful in its





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AIR WE GO: Was Edmund Steedman's 1879 prediction of an airship of the "near future" the source of the Aurora craft?

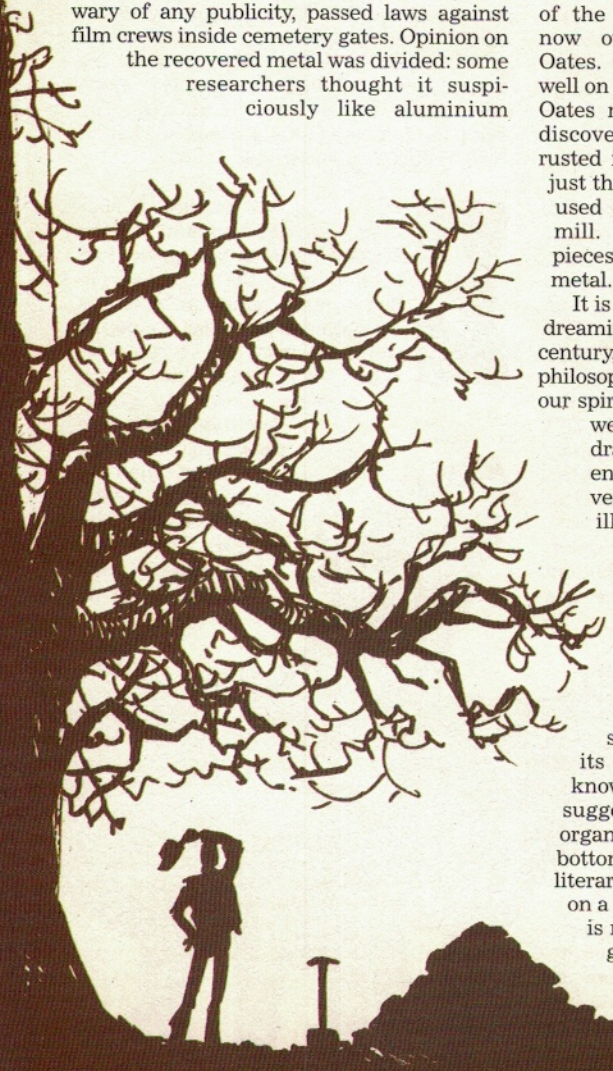
legal battle: there would be no exhumation. Walter Andrus, the head of MUFON, and UFOB's Hayden Hewes came to blows. Hewes attacked Andrus for his "total ineptness in the investigation" to which Andrus replied, "Hewes speaks only for himself and the unsuccessful results he obtained". With no way to continue the investigation, and with so many other cases demanding attention (remember, this was the Seventies), the UFO groups called it a day. Case continued the investigation, even going so far as to make arrangements in December of that year for a subsurface radar scan of the grave, but by January 1974 he was dead.

Did anything come of it? Aurorans, now wary of any publicity, passed laws against film crews inside cemetery gates. Opinion on the recovered metal was divided: some researchers thought it suspiciously like aluminium cookware but others, like NTSU professor Tom Gray, found it "highly unusual" and "puzzling". Etta Pegues wrote a history of Aurora in 1975 that pronounced Heydon's original *Dallas Morning News* piece a hoax, though she kindly noted that it was also "a beautiful piece of fiction". Like Tolbert and Case, Pegues also produced witnesses, all of whom swore that there never was any windmill on Judge Proctor's farm, as the story in the paper had claimed. The great airship had nothing to collide with, it seemed, because it had never existed.

The old Proctor farm, site of the alleged crash, was now owned by Brawley Oates. Cleaning out an old well on his property one day, Oates made an interesting discovery. He found four rusted iron corner posts, of just the kind that would be used to support a windmill. All around were pieces of a strange, silvery metal.

It is 1997, and America is dreaming. It has been a long century, filled with wars and philosophical upheavals, and our spirits are not what they were in former days. As the century draws to its close, Europeans receive enigmatic glyphs from a benevolent vegetation deity, while we are bedevilled by underworlders like the Chupacabras, who feasts on the blood of goats.

On the whole, this century has not been kind to myths, but in the imaginative elaboration of the events surrounding the Roswell crash I believe we are witnessing the creation of a new myth of singular power. It carefully maintains its plausibility by side-stepping the known, thriving in regions science can suggest but not directly examine. It is organic, in that it is evolving from the bottom up, rather than being imposed by a literary or religious elite. Once dependent on a handful of questionable witnesses, it is now entwined in a productive synergy with the mysterious events at Area 51, a top-secret Air Force base.



THE AURORA MYTH IS IN SOME WAYS ROSWELL'S STILLBORN TWIN

Roswell, like all mythology, is a way of structuring our relationship with other worlds, and it thrives on the confusion we have already discussed between the two celestial realms. Reduced to its essentials, it tells an old Gnostic tale: Once there was a man from the heavens who died and whose body was taken from us. Though we devoutly wish it, the stone at the mouth of his tomb will not roll away, for it is guarded by an elaborate hierarchy of malevolent go-betweens, the deranged acolytes of a corrupted status quo. Their names are legion: NSA, Air Force, Men In Black. The Gnostics called them Archons, and knew them as the dark angels who keep man separate from the Other World.

It is a tale that wants to become a tragedy, but cannot, since it currently ends where the ancients advised us to begin our stories: in the middle of things. Human agents who won't quit the search hold out a redemptive promise. Every week, millions of Americans vicariously participate in this myth, through the agency of our premiere *fin de siècle* entertainment, *The X-Files*. Erik Davis once wrote of UFOs that they were "part of a package deal – a rumour of a god stitched into the dark web of our military industrial media complex." But it was not always so. Aurora is an old myth that is also new, and in some ways it is Roswell's stillborn twin. It is not as well known, and in some ways it is less glamorous. But in what it says about us and our possible relationship with other worlds, it is a nobler tale.

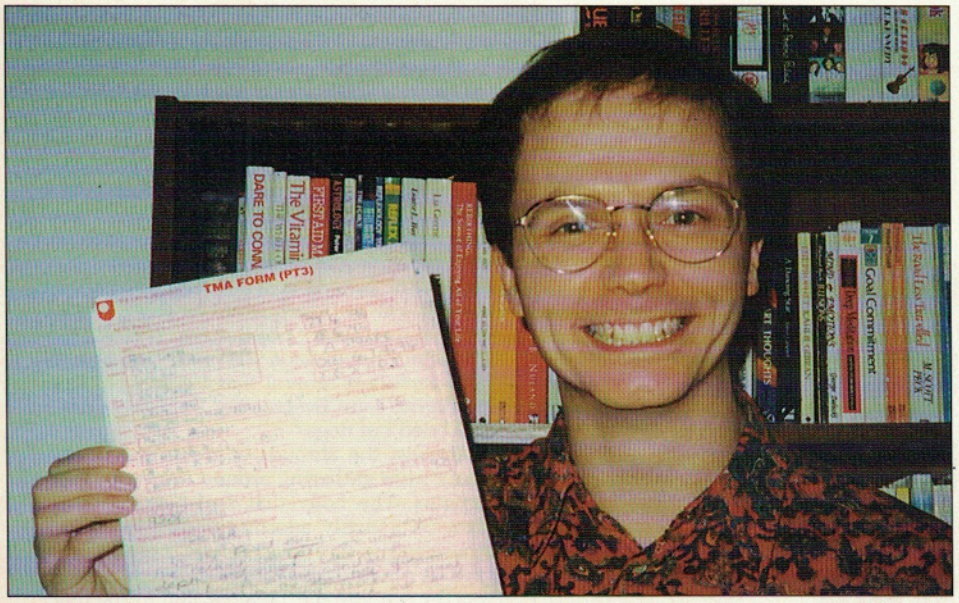
Long ago, in a small Texas town, a man from the heavens died and was buried. There was no cover-up, no military involvement, and no grisly 'autopsy' where the body of the visitor was blasphemously hacked to pieces. Rather, the townspeople, recognising a kinship with this strange being from another world, made a place for him among their own honoured dead.

Science fiction is as good a place as any to search for guidance in these matters, and in this instance, does not disappoint. Clifford Simak's 1963 novel *Way Station* deals with elements of both the Roswell and Aurora myths. The protagonist, a Civil War veteran named Enoch Wallace, makes space in his own family plot for an alien visitor who has died while on Earth. An intelligence agency shadowing Wallace steals the body, and though it is eventually returned, Wallace's decision to erect a marker for the alien figures prominently in a judgement of the Earth at the novel's end, made by a Galactic Federation. The engraving reads: "Here lies one from a distant star, but the soil is not alien to him, for in death he belongs to the universe".

On 14 July 1973 our own visitor's marker was stolen from his grave by parties unknown. It was never recovered. To this end, FringeWare is commissioning a replacement for the original marker, to be returned to the city of Aurora, Texas. Anyone interested in providing support for this project is invited to stop by the store or write to Aurora Marker Association, c/o FringeWare Review, 2716 Guadalupe St, Austin, TX 78705, USA.

"I got 95% in a University essay – thanks to PhotoReading!"

A remarkable new technique is revolutionising studying. It enables anyone to mentally photograph the printed page at the rate of one page a second – *writes Chris Payne.*



Says Peter Barka: "I got 95% for an essay on Freud and 88% for one on Piaget – and it's all down to the PhotoReading home study course. All I did was PhotoRead the relevant chapters at the rate of one page a second – about 25,000 words per minute."

I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT," said Peter Barka, who lives in Surbiton. "I opened up the envelope containing my marks for two Open University essays I wrote, and got a real shock. My tutor had awarded me 95% for an essay on Freud and 88% for one on Piaget – and it's all down to the PhotoReading home study course.

"What amazed me was that I was only expecting 65-70%, which I usually get for my essays. I hadn't done any background reading – I didn't get round to it in time – or the expected 15 hours a week study time!

"Yet my tutor wrote in his report: 'In the Freud essay you analysed the relevant concepts with unusual depth and insight. Clearly a pass 1 (95%). A similar standard is maintained in the short notes questions. You have evidently gained a great deal of knowledge which will be of use throughout the course.'

"I was shocked at the result"

"All I did was PhotoRead the relevant chapters on Freud and Piaget at the rate of one page a second – about 25,000 words per minute. Then, when I Rapid Read the chapters, I noticed that the text seemed to have a tinge of familiarity to it. I also PhotoRead some essay/thesis-writing guides.

"When I sat down and wrote the essay I felt I knew something about the subject. But after I wrote the essay I thought 'Oh my god, I'll probably do worse than last time when I got 73%', especially as I'm very left brain, and the subject matter was more right brained. How wrong I was!"

Peter was overjoyed on the day he got, for him, the unusually high marks: "I felt delirious, and I danced around like an idiot. I was just shocked at the result. I still feel quite shaky when I talk to my friends about the possibilities of PhotoReading."

"I'm absolutely bowled over!"

Hilke Legenhausen, 27, and based in East Grinstead, earns her living as a translator. She spent a couple of weeks learning to PhotoRead, and then PhotoRead her German-English dictionary twice.

"The dictionary has 1,600 pages, so I Photo-Read the whole of it in about half an hour. I got my personal proof that the system works when I translated a German magazine into English: I only had to look up four expressions when 40 or 50 would be normal for me. I'm absolutely bowled over!

"I'm about to start PhotoReading all my text-books for the next year, and guess what: anatomy and physiology don't scare me anymore!"

Ms Hilke Legenhausen: PhotoRead a German-English dictionary and "got personal proof that the system works"

"I almost felt a cheat"

Vee Freir, who lives in the Highlands of Scotland, recently completed an Open University BSc Honours degree.

In the last OU year she had to read 22 course units, plus set books and other reference material, and submit seven written assessments (TMAs) which included project work.

She enthuses: "As a result of using the PhotoReading techniques I got so far ahead that I completed the reading and the written assessments a couple of months early. The tutor was a bit taken aback as he'd never experienced this before and, what's more, my assessments averaged 87%.

"For one essay I went in the library and PhotoRead 16 books with the purpose of getting one relevant quote from each. Within half an hour of PhotoReading I had done just that, and I was amazed how quickly it happened.

"I almost felt a cheat, yet I went through every page of each book, and must have subconsciously absorbed the relevant parts to have accessed the information that quickly."

"A strange experience" says McKenna

TV hypnotist Paul McKenna learned to PhotoRead for a Channel 4 documentary. He commented: "When PhotoReading does work it's a strange experience. I ended up feeling a bit light-headed. I couldn't actually remember anything about the book – until the questions started. I just seemed to know some of the answers. I scored 73% which was statistically well in excess of anything I could have got just by guessing."

"PhotoReading is literally eye-opening"

Sheila Ostrander, co-author of the best-selling book SuperLearning 2000, is very enthusiastic about PhotoReading: "It's literally eye-opening. In a sense PhotoReading is a specialised case of SuperLearning. The same core techniques are evoked – being in the right state of body and mind, feeding data to and accessing it from the unconscious, dissolving learning blocks – but applied to reading instead of, say, language learning.

"PhotoRead 100s of pages in minutes"

"Once you're connected to your brilliant second self, your unconscious, you can PhotoRead hundreds of pages in a very short time – just a few minutes – then be able to zero in on the key nuggets. This belief echoes the time-expansion work of Erikson, Rakov, and Houston and Masters, where people are prompted to get out of their own way and let their unconscious do the work in a fraction of the usual time."

Ostrander carries on: "Speed reading has been around and working for over half a century, yet it's still rarely used in business or education. PhotoReading is a much more organic system, which flows with the nature of our expanding view of ourselves. It may well be standard equipment for 21st century Superlearners."

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On 3 September 1658, there was a terrific hurricane across Europe, in London the Thames flooded and Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of England, died of a fever following a gall stone infection.[1] On 10 November, he was interred in Westminster Abbey in an extravagant ceremony based on that of Philip II of Spain. The funeral cost between £30,000 and £60,000, half as much again as any previous royal interment. Londoners pelted the Protector's escutcheon with mud and stones. "The joyfullest funeral that I ever saw," said the diarist John Evelyn, "for there were none that cried but dogs."

Already, the shrouds of myth and uncertainty were gathering around the Protector's remains. The body that had been lying in state on a richly adorned bed in Somerset House was in fact a wax effigy. According to various imaginative chroniclers, the body was thrown into the Thames; laid in the field of Naseby, or in the coffin of Charles I at Windsor, or in the vaults of the Claypoles in the parish church of Northampton; or even "carried away in the tempest the night before".

Shortly after Cromwell's death, a post mortem by Dr George Bate reported that the vessels of the brain were "overcharged", implying that the skull cap had been removed for his investigation. Then an attempted embalment had gone badly awry. The body had been filled with aromatic herbs and placed within a lead coffin, inside a wooden one; but, as Dr Bate wrote: "The filth broke through them all, and it was prudent to bury him immediately, which was done in as private manner as possible".

Cromwell's death mask[2] was probably taken by the official engraver Thomas Simon for the purposes of creating the wax effigy. A copy was owned by Sir Richard Tangye in the 19th century. "It bears unmistakable evidence of being genuine," he wrote. "The large face and large features, the wart over the right eyebrow, and the general appearance are all strikingly like the portraits, especially that painted by Lely. It is known that Oliver usually wore his moustache, and a tuft under his lower lip; it is also known that during his daughter's illness he refused to be shaven, and the mask shows a fortnight's growth."[3]

Following the restoration of Charles II, Cromwell's body was taken from its majestic tomb in Westminster Abbey's Henry VII Chapel on 29 January 1661 and kept overnight in the Red Lion Inn in Holborn.[4] An inscribed, double-gilded coffin plate found on the breast of the corpse was kept by the sergeant in charge of the guard. The plate was later passed on by his daughter, Mrs Gifford, to a family named Hobart, and during the last century came into the possession of the then Marquis of Ripon.

The following day, fittingly the 12th anniversary of Charles I's decapitation, Cromwell's cadaver was drawn on a sledge to

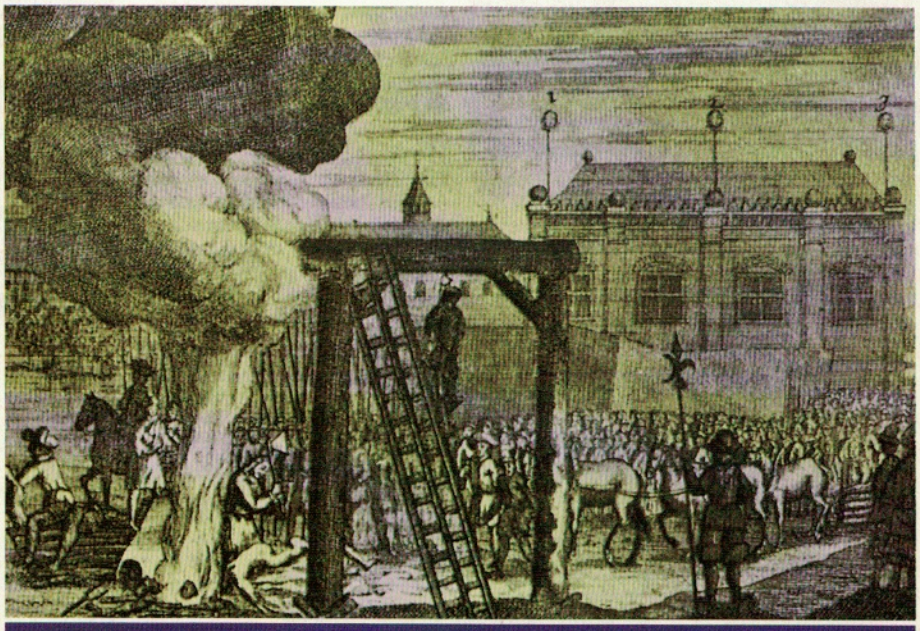
MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

HIS HEAD

ALL SCHOOLCHILDREN KNOW THE STORY OF OLIVER CROMWELL BUT FEW REALISE IT CONTINUED AFTER HIS DEATH. **GEOFFREY ABBOTT** AND **PAUL SIEVEKING** CHRONICLE THE UNCERTAIN ADVENTURES OF CROMWELL'S HEAD.

Tyburn, where (together with those of fellow regicides Ireton and Bradshaw) it was, according to Evelyn, "hanged on the gallows from nine in the morning until six at night," after which it was cut down and beheaded. The London hangman at that time was Edward Dun, an executioner not noted for his expertise.[5] It took six or eight blows with the axe to sever Cromwell's head, which was covered with several layers of grave cloths. Fingers, toes and an ear were taken as souvenirs.

As decreed by Parliament, the three torsos were buried beneath the gallows, and it may be significant that in the *Times* of 9 May 1860 it was reported that, during excavations at the Tyburn site, workmen uncovered a quantity of bones. Since the remains of others hanged there were almost invariably taken away for dissection or display on the City's gates, the bones uncovered might well have been those of Cromwell and his two henchmen, although whether all three cadavers were actually buried there is open to doubt; Tangye states that the coffins of Ireton and Bradshaw were later discovered in the vaults of Mugginton Church in Derbyshire.



JUST HANGING AROUND: The bodies of Cromwell, Bradshaw and Ireton are "executed" in this rare Dutch engraving.

Some disputed that Cromwell had been hanged at all. Despite the brandishing of the head for the crowds to see, rumour spread that another corpse had been substituted during the overnight stay at the Red Lion. Others insisted that after decapitation, Cromwell's torso was not buried beneath the gallows but had been retrieved from the stables of a nearby tavern by Cromwell's grieving daughter Mary, second wife of Thomas Belasyse, first Earl Fauconberg.

It was said she took the headless remains home with her to Newburgh Priory near Coxwold in North Yorkshire. There they have been variously reported as being entombed in what became known as "Cromwell's Room", an enclosed space at the top of a large and elaborate porch, or in a small bricked-off compartment, about 4ft (1.2m) high, beneath a sloping roof of rough planks in the attic. Since then the tomb, wherever situated, has remained unopened despite pleas from people as eminent as the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) who was a guest in the house.

One vague 18th century writer quotes the legend that Cromwell's remains were obtained by some of his followers and buried in a field on the north side of Holborn, the spot marked by an obelisk which formerly stood in the middle of Red Lion Square.

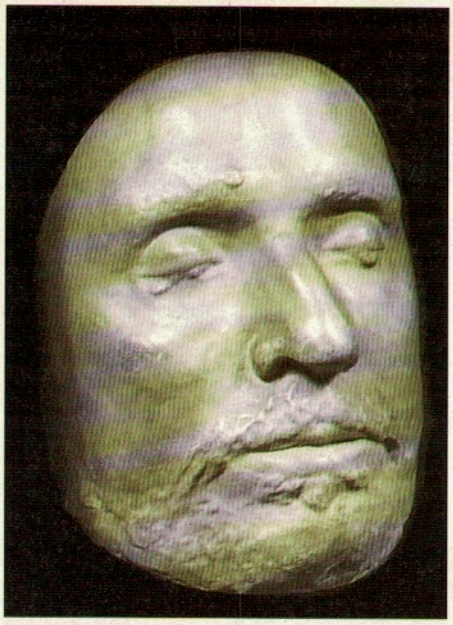
CROMWELL'S HEAD ON A SPIKE REMAINED ON VIEW UNTIL BLOWN DOWN IN A STORM

On 5 February 1661, six days after the decapitations, the heads of the three regicides were displayed on spikes atop Westminster Hall, where they were seen that first day by the diarist Samuel Pepys. After this, the story becomes quite vague for a while. Cromwell's head remained on view until blown down in a storm in 1684, November 1688 – or possibly 1703.[6] It was found by a sentry sheltering from the gale who, according to reports in the *Daily Chronicle* of 1895 and *Daily Mail* of 1904, concealed it under his cloak, took it home, and hid it in the chimney[7]. In one source, he is named as "Private Barnes of Lord Arlington's regiment", who died in 1702.[7] On his deathbed the sentry divulged the secret to his wife, and it is likely that the son-in-law sold the head to Claudius du Puy, a French-Swiss calico printer who ran a museum of curiosities and is mentioned in Pepys' *Diary*. On 1 July 1710, Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach, a German traveller, reported seeing the head in Du Puy's show – part of a motley collection of marine monstrosities, idols, waxworks, musical instruments and strange footwear that filled four rooms.

Du Puy is said to have died intestate in 1738, and we next hear of the head in 1773, in the possession of Samuel Russell, "a dissolute, drunken and impecunious comedian", one of the Cambridge branch of Cromwell's family through his daughter Frances, Lady Rich. Russell attempted to sell the head to Sydney Sussex College, where Cromwell had once been a student. When the offer was turned down, he exhibited the head in a small museum near Long Acre, where it was seen by Sir Joshua Reynolds in 1786.

On 13 April 1787, the head was "picked up as a bargain for £118" by James Cox (or Fox), variously described as a London antiquarian dealer, jeweller, money-lender or showman; and then in 1799 for £230 by a trio of speculators, T N Hughes and his brothers.[7] John Cranch was employed as "curator" and placed the following advertisement in the *Morning Chronicle* of 18 March 1799:

"*The Real Embalmed Head of the Powerful and Renowned Usurper, Oliver Cromwell, is now exhibited at 5 in Mead Court, Old Bond Street (where the rattlesnake was shown last year): a genuine Narrative relating to its Acquisition, Concealment*



NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

THE FACE FITS: Cromwell's death mask (above) and the Wilkinson head (below), believed to be genuine.

and Preservation is to be had at the Place of Exhibition. Tickets Half a Crown."

The Hughes brothers went bust shortly afterwards and the head was sold in 1814 to Dr Josiah Henry Wilkinson by the daughter of the last surviving brother. An alternative narrative[8] makes no reference to these brothers, but states that by 1812 Russell, Cox and Cranch were all dead and the head passed to "three nieces of the last [unspecified] survivor". They in turn passed it on to Dr Wilkinson, who was their medical adviser.

In 1822, the novelist Maria Edgeworth confided in a letter: "Mr. Wilkinson its present possessor doats [sic] on it." From 1814 to 1960, the head remained in the Wilkinson family, who kept it in the silk-lined box made for it by the Russells. From studying contemporary portraits, the sculptor John Flaxman said that Cromwell's jaw was short and straight and "set out at an angle which gave him a jowlish appearance." The relic answered exactly to this description.

By the 1860s the head had passed to Mr W A Wilkinson of Beckenham, Kent. Timbs described how "in the part above the crown of the head, the pike is worn almost as thin as a bodkin by having been subjected to the variations of the weather, but the part within the skull which is protected by its situation, is not so much corroded. The woodwork (the shaft of the pike), part of which remains, is so much worm-eaten that it cannot be touched without crumbling."[9]

In March 1911 the head, then owned by the Rev Horace R Wilkinson of Woodbridge, Suffolk, was exhibited at the Royal Archæological Institute in London. Two other skulls claiming to be Cromwell's, probably products of an 18th century cottage industry in fake relics, were also presented for examination. Public figures, including the eminent antiquaries Sir Henry Howorth and Dr Boyd Dawkins, declared the Wilkinson head was undoubtedly that of Cromwell.

One of the imposter skulls had been inherited by Benjamin Jowett, the 19th century philosopher and Master of Balliol College, Oxford, who gave it in 1885 to W P Ellis, a local GP.

It eventually passed to Ellis's grandson, David Manning Press, a retired tourist guide living near Canterbury, who in January 1998 decided to dispose of it. However, it failed to match the authenticated death mask in the Ashmolean; what's more, the lower jaw came from another individual. The third skull was once kept in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, but disappeared some time soon after the 1911 meeting.[10]

In 1932, the Wilkinson head was loaned to London University Faculty of Medicine, where Professor Karl Pearson and Dr G M Morant, among others, were producing a book illustrating every known picture of Cromwell. The expert opinion of Charles ffoulkes, Master of the Tower Armouries, was sought. He confirmed that because of its design the pike which still pierced the skull was indeed a 17th century fighting weapon, and that a wormhole which penetrated both the broken oak shaft and the skull showed that both head and pike had been aligned in that position for over two centuries.[11]

THE EXACT SPOT WHERE THE HEAD WAS BURIED IS KNOWN ONLY TO A FEW OFFICERS

Pearson and Morant published *The Portraiture of Oliver Cromwell with Special Reference to the Wilkinson Head* in 1935. Following an analysis of records, measurements, X-ray pictures, portraits and sculptures, the authors stated that the skull was that of a male about 60 years old and tallied with what was known of Cromwell's appearance, including reddish hair, a mustache, small beard and a depression for the wart over his right eye. The skull cap had been removed, the body embalmed and later decapitated after death by about six strokes. One ear was missing and the nose pushed to the right (caused either when the severed head fell from the block or by subsequent rough handling). The imputed brain capacity of 1,500cc fitted the 2,126 grammes noted in Dr Bate's autopsy. "It is a moral certainty drawn from circumstantial evidence," they concluded, "that the Wilkinson head is the genuine head of Oliver Cromwell, Protector of the Commonwealth."

The relic subsequently passed to Canon Horace Wilkinson of Woodbridge, great grandson of Josiah Wilkinson. Victoria Sieveking (sister of *Fortean Times*'s co-editor) was photographed in Woodbridge by her father holding the gruesome relic in 1956.[12] It was still kept wrapped in dark red silk in a shiny black box. When Canon Wilkinson died, his son offered the head again to Cromwell's old college, Sidney Sussex in Cambridge, and this time it was accepted. A further detail of authenticity was noted by Dr Christopher Parish, a retired surgeon and Fellow of the college. "The Wilkinson head," he wrote, "has had the skull cap removed and is covered with embalmed skin later resutured to the skull with flax fibre. Cotton could have been used, but the first cotton shipments arrived from America about 1770."

The head was buried in "a sort of large zinc biscuit tin," according to Derek Beales, professor of modern history at Cambridge, who witnessed the interment. The exact spot is known only to a few college officers. On an oval plaque at the left-hand side of the chapel entrance, is inscribed:

"*Near to this place was buried on 25 March 1960 the head of OLIVER CROMWELL Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland. Fellow Commoner of this College 1616–17.*"

FOOTNOTES

1. Davey (1906).
2. Several plaster casts of the mask exist, including one in the Ashmolean at Oxford and one in the Hutton Collection at Princeton University. The cast in the National Portrait Gallery is not identical to the others, suggesting that perhaps two masks were taken.
3. Tangye (1899).
4. Kent (1952), quoting James Heath's *Flagellum* (1663).
5. Bleakley (1929)
6. Mould says 1685, the Wilkinson family version says November 1688, and Timbs says the Great Storm of 26–27 November 1703, immortalised by Daniel Defoe.
7. New Bedford (MA) Standard Times, 6 July 1996.
8. Kent (1952).
9. Timbs (c.1865)
10. See "A couple of heads too many for the old protector" by Maev Kennedy, *Guardian*, 26 Jan; and *Kent Messenger*, 13 Feb 1998.
11. ffoulkes (1939).
12. Alas, these photographs by Lance Sieveking cannot be found.

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Geoffrey Abbott's latest book, *Mysteries of the Tower of London*, is available from Hendon Publishing Co, Hendon Mill, Nelson, Lancs BB9 8AD, price £4.99.

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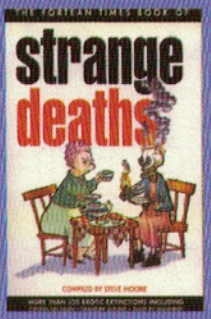

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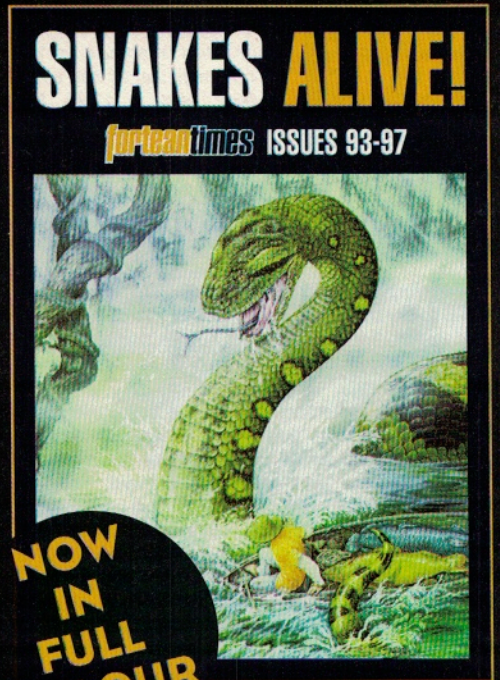

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CLOSING THE DREAM FACTORY

PATRICK HUYGHE INVESTIGATES THE TRUTH BEHIND THE CLOSURE OF SONY'S SEVEN-YEAR PARANORMAL RESEARCH EFFORT: A STORY OF QUIET SUCCESS AND CORPORATE DISAPPOINTMENT. ILLUSTRATION BY **CHRISTOS MAGGANAS**

This summer, Japan's enormously successful electronics giant, the Sony Corporation, dropped a bombshell by announcing that ESP exists. They didn't exactly shout it from the rooftops, however. In fact, the findings of their seven-year research programme into a variety of paranormal subjects caused nary a ripple in the summer's news. That's the way Sony wanted it, of course, and the way the company has been running its programme right from the beginning. Totally hush-hush.

Sony's jaw-dropping announcement in July was paired with another surprise. While psychic powers were real, said Sony spokesman Masanobu Sakaguchi, the company was closing down its ESP research facility. For those unfamiliar with the nitty-gritty of Sony's programme – which involved studies of *qi*, presentiment, synchronicity, mind-body interactions, consciousness, the sixth sense and supernatural phenomena – the visionary company left the distinct impression that it had suffered a sudden loss of vision. Here they were on top of a psychic Mount Everest and the company had decided not to capitalise on their monumental findings. Why?

Two years ago, in Las Vegas, I met Yoichiro Sako, the director of the Sony paranormal lab, heard his presentation before a group of sympathetic scientists, and spoke to him at length. This little peek into what Sony was doing – and more importantly, how it was doing it – shed some light on why it decided to pull back from the venture and close down the lab. Clearly, all was not well with the Sony programme.

Sony had shied away from discussing the lab – codenamed ESPER, which stands for "Extrasensory Perception and Excitation Research" – and preferred no publicity about it. There was no mention of it in the company's annual reports, on its websites, or anywhere else for that matter. But coming to Vegas was Yoichiro Sako, the founder and director of the ESPER lab, to present an invited paper before the annual meeting of the Society for Scientific Exploration, an organisation consisting largely of scientists and engineers interested in UFOs, the paranormal and other anomalous phenomena.

This was not the first time that Sony had let the ESPER cat out of the bag. They first came clean about its psi research in 1995 after the nerve gas subway attacks by the Aum Shinri Kyo cult aroused suspicions about occult practices. Despite Sony's reticence, the lab enjoyed widespread popularity in Japan at large, but not within the company itself. While some people in the company were interested in his work, Sako admitted to me that more than a few others thought his work was "crazy."

Yoshihiro Otsuki, a professor of physics at Waseda University – perhaps better known to forteans for his interest in crop circles and balls of light – led a blistering attack against the lab when it became public. By pouring money into paranormal research, he said, "Sony might as well be denying that its products can be trusted." Otsuki went on to describe the journal which had published Sako's findings as an "occult journal."

WHY WOULD SONY GET INVOLVED IN THE MARGINAL WORLD OF CREATING PSI-BASED PRODUCTS

The notion of a trendsetting company like Sony trying to develop psi-based products is rather refreshing – if not a little improbable. Why would one of the world's leading technology companies get involved in the marginal world of telepathy and clairvoyance? Never mind that most scientists and engineers don't even believe psi exists; their scepticism would be moot if someone could create something – anything – useful based on psi.

A wealth of ideas based on psi technologies has been bandied about in the literature over the past couple of decades. These range from a wheelchair for quadriplegics controlled solely by intentional thought to a lock based on mental patterns rather than on fingerprints or retinal patterns. When I finally had the opportunity to ask Sako if Sony had any psi-based products in the works, he flashed a great big friendly smile – followed after a long delay by a vigorous shake of the head. There are no products. Not yet.

Sako was an unlikely man in an unlikely job. His background was strictly orthodox and, as far as I could determine, he had no more than a passing knowledge of paranormal subjects until his rise to psi fame at Sony. Sako was unwilling to say whether he possesses any psychic powers himself, although he admitted to a long interest in the subject.

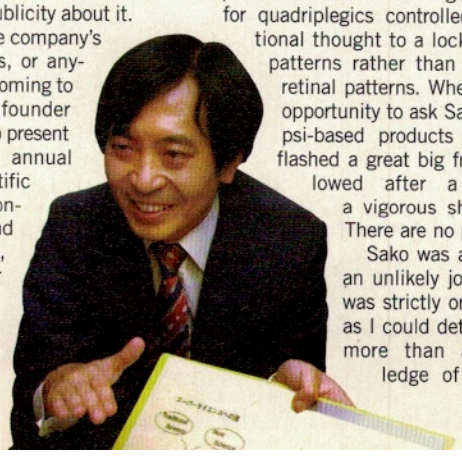
In any case, he graduated from the prestigious Tokyo University with a degree in mathematics and computer science and joined Sony immediately after graduation. He first worked on CDs, CD-ROMs, and eight-millimetre video before moving on to voice recognition technology and other areas of artificial intelligence. After covering all these bases, there was only one place left to go – over the edge.

In 1989, Sako approached one of Sony's two founding fathers, Masaru Ibuka, about starting a special department to study the "human science," or bioenergy, which the Chinese call "*qi*" (pronounced ch'i).

Sako's proposal to study bioenergy at Sony was not a shot in the dark. It was no secret that Ibuka was interested in traditional medicine, as well as ESP. Indeed, back in 1988, Ibuka had established the Pulse Graph Research Department, which has worked on a device that claims to identify health problems by measuring the pulse. In any case, Sako's hunch proved correct and by 1990 he was doing qi research at Sony's Corporate Research Laboratory, measuring pulse, skin temperature and other physiological changes that take place in the body while *qi* masters tried to alter a patient's *qi* energy.

By 1 November 1991, Sako had convinced the Sony founders to establish a separate laboratory, ESPER, where he could continue his *qi* research and range into psi topics as well. Sako was installed as the director of the five-person lab, no doubt a mere closet operation within the enormous Sony universe. But the fact that this research was taking place at all and had been budgeted – though to what extent no one would say – indicated that Sony believed Sako's paranormal research had some potential.

Clearly, however, Sony was confused over the lab's role within the company during its seven-year existence. On 1 January 1993, Sony established the Research Institute of Wisdom, which oversaw the work both of the ESPER Laboratory and the Pulse Graph Research Department. Then on



SONY THINKMAN: Yoichiro Sako.

1 February 1995, the ESPER Lab was split off from the Research Institute of Wisdom and became part of the company's R&D Division.

As a long-time fan of all things Sony, I expected to be wowed by Sako's presentation in Las Vegas, but the abstract for 'Challenging an Unknown Information System' – with its emphasis on "paradigm," "turning points" and the "new age" – sounded like gobbledegook. I'd heard this kind of talk from parapsychologists, both university-affiliated and less, for decades, and I expected more from Sony.

But Sako's talk proved both surprising and, in a way, rather amusing. "If it is difficult for you to understand my talk due to my poor English," he began, "please understand my talk using telepathy." Sako then pulled out his first viewgraph. Viewgraphs? Overhead projectors? This was Sony? I had expected a laptop-controlled digital extravaganza. I wondered if Sako could possibly be uncomfortable with technology and I noticed immediately that he did not wear eyeglasses or contacts either, though he seemed to need them. Nor did he wear a digital watch – or any watch for that matter. Could he be technophobic, I wondered? Would this carry over into his research on matters parapsychological?

But viewgraphs it was, and the first one – "Why?" written in large letters – was perfect. This was the burning question on everyone's mind, of course; why was one of the world's premier electronics giants researching psi? "It's quite simple," said Sako, dressed in appropriate executive attire – dark blue suit, blue shirt, and a tie striped blue, red and gold – "It's a Sony." Sako sounded like he was trying to force a square peg down a round hole. "I think Sony's spirit is making dreams," he continued, "rather than making money." Sure, I thought, and Earth is the centre of the universe.

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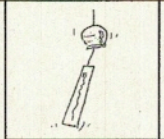
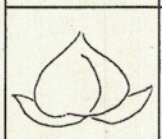
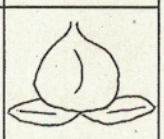
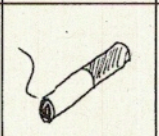
Y.T. (♂)		
		
T.N. (♀)		
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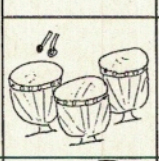
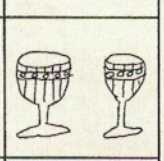
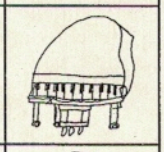
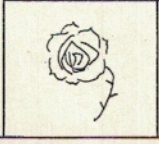
		
Y.M. (♀)		
		

STATUS SYMBOLS: Test responses are on the right.

The ESPER lab's greatest success, Sako went on to explain, had come in the field of clairvoyance, the ability to get information about physical objects or distant events that is beyond the reach of the ordinary senses. In one series of experiments, clairvoyance was defined as the ability to "see" letters and drawings on a target piece of paper without the use of sight. One subject was a 10-year-old schoolgirl. Children, Sako explained, are better at such things as clairvoyance than adults. Sako then described his amazing experiment. He would take a piece of paper about 1.5in (3.8cm) square and write or draw something on it. He would then fold it once, twice, three times and then crumple it up. Afterward the experimenter would hand the tiny wad of paper with the target on it to the subject to hold pinched between two fingers, or place the piece of paper in the subject's ear. Sako did not smile. Was he pulling our legs?

"I THINK SONY'S SPIRIT IS MAKING DREAMS RATHER THAN MAKING MONEY", SAID SAKO

At first I thought this must be a relic behaviour from using a Sony Walkman but, after further reflection – and a look at a paper written by Sako on 'Clairvoyance and Synæsthesia' in the *Journal of International Society of Life Information Science* (March 1997) – I concluded that this experimental method must be based on the belief that clairvoyance could be due to synæsthesia, a crossing of the senses [see ***FT113:28-31***]. Perhaps the ear could 'see' what was written on the paper? But Sako's own research on the subject showed only the slimmest evidence of synæsthesia in clairvoyance. In a total of 20 trials, there were only two examples for which the first sensation of the target was not visual, but hearing and smell.

The best method, Sako told the audience, was "in the ear." We were into deep weirdness here. And when Sako said best, he meant best. In 35 trials, the recognition rate was an astonishing 97.1 per cent; a success rate unheard of in Western parapsychology experiments. There were 18 perfectly matching responses, noted Sako, including the equation "1+ 2= 5" (a result which led Sako to comment "It's wrong, but right".) Sixteen responses were so "closely matching" that most Western experimenters would likely call them perfect hits. There was one false response. It was too good to be true.

How did they do this? Sako described the nine step process successful children seemed to use in clairvoyance: 1) Close the eyes, but this was not necessary. 2) Concentrate. 3) Imagine unfolding the piece of paper, but this also was not necessary. 4) A light then appears in the middle of their forehead. 5) The light expands as the surroundings darken. 6) A letter appears within the light. 7) Shift the light or letter to one side in order to read more of the image, like moving the beam of a spotlight across a billboard. 8) Memorise each letter. 9) Write them down. Easy, isn't it?

The simpler the letters and drawings, Sako told us, the easier they are to sense. But the trials were made more difficult, he said, when the target pieces of paper were put in an envelope (though, oddly, it was still possible for the subject to sense the target in the envelope when the room was darkened). This was big news, at least to me. Why this should be true poses a real problem. For decades one of the most solid results of western parapsychological research has been that psi abilities persist regardless of space or time considerations – whether the subject or target is shielded in any way, even using lead chambers. So how could a measly envelope prevent psi?

There was one obvious explanation: placing the targets in an envelope thwarted cheating by the subjects. When I questioned Sako about this later, he insisted that no cheating was involved; the subject's tests were all videotaped. But was this enough, I wondered. One scientist who overheard Sako's remark thought that a magician should be present to ensure that no trickery was taking place, and many others expressed skepticism regarding Sako's results. "In a science laboratory," a professor of astronomy told me afterward, "you look out for a perfect score. If it is, then you know cheating is involved." The ESPER Lab procedures also raised serious doubts.

For others, however, Sako's results made perfect sense. Bill Higgins of PEAR Inc. in New Jersey, a company that is itself attempting to create commercial products based on psi technology – see ***FT106:28-31*** – thought Sako was onto something. "He's shown the importance of the tactile sense," said an excited Higgins, who was planning to repeat the Sako experiments at home with his own children.

But Sako had also told the audience that clairvoyance works without having the subject touch the paper at all. This seemed to contradict his work in non-visual colour recognition, described in another paper published in the *Journal of International Society of Life Information Science*, which hints that there might be something to touch sight or "derma-sight."

For me, the really surprising thing about the incredible success of ESPER's clairvoyance results was its apparent denial of technology. For a company like Sony, the incongruity of the situation was striking. In the western world, modern parapsychological research is the epitome of highly controlled hi-tech studies in which the experimenters write themselves out of the experiment. Sako's approach was so personal (becoming friends with his sensitives rather than keeping an objective distance) and low-tech that I wondered for an instant if he was not hiding Sony's true psi research from us.

Again, I questioned Sako; his reply was disarming and direct: "Yes, it's low-tech. Hi-tech is not necessary." Of course, whether the technology is low or hi matters little, as long as there is a product. But Sony had no product in mind, Sako admitted, and neither did he. And that, it now turns out, seven years after the ESPER lab began its work, was the rub.

"We found out experimentally that ESP exists," Sony spokesman Masanobu told the *South China Morning Post* in a story that appeared on 7 July, "but that any practical application of this knowledge is not likely in the foreseeable future." And so, without the promise of marketable products, Sony decided to shut down its ESPER lab.

The decision seemed to make perfect business sense; but the truth is that Sony's vaunted "vision factory" had come up short, without foresight about a subject that demanded it most. Perhaps the real reason the ESPER lab got the boot lies elsewhere. Sony's corporate culture was deeply embarrassed by the research and so, when Masaru Ibuka died on 19 December 1997, the writing was on the lab wall.

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CORRECTIONS

Stephen E. Troy, the dedicated researcher into lunar anomalies whose work I cited in my 'Lunar Construction Site' (*FT112:28*) believes I have misquoted him by attributing to him the statement: "NASA has been most co-operative". The proper quotation, says Troy, is: "NASA has been most cooperative in sending data and in responding to all photo requests." We are happy to oblige. Troy's website can be found at www.lunaranomalies.com

A small number of readers have taken me to take me to task for an uncharacteristically negative outburst in a past issue, in which I said that the Lamarckian idea of the inheritance of acquired characteristics had been thoroughly discredited. I apologise and commend their vigilance. I was wrong, of course, to use the word 'thoroughly' as almost anything can be said to have been discredited at one time or another in the eyes of its opponents, regardless of whether or not it actually has been disproved. Still, I am not aware of any positive proof of the inheritance of acquired characteristics that does not rely on circumstantial conditions or inferences. Perhaps someone more knowledgeable can inform us otherwise. **BOB RICKARD**

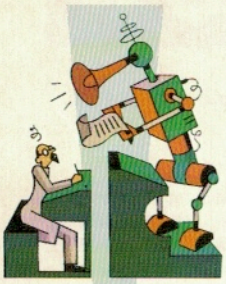
CHARLES HOY FORT (1874–1932)

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'FORTEAN'?

FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort. Throughout his life, Fort was sceptical about scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data was ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away (which is quite different from explaining a thing).

Fort, born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

His dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate state between extremes. He had ideas of the universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena. He coined the term 'teleportation' and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

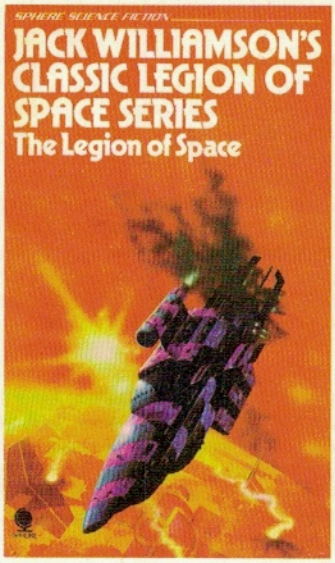


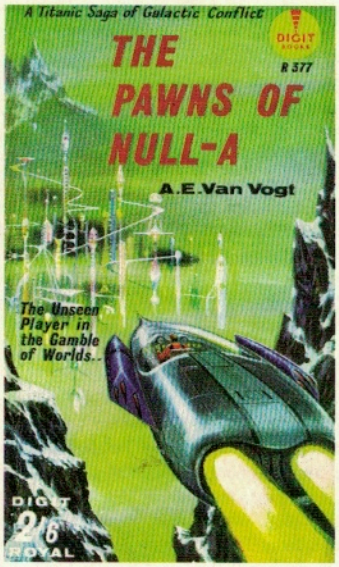
GIANTS IN THE PLAYGROUND

STEVE HOLLAND takes a nostalgic look back to the Golden Age of science fiction and discovers an era that could help fire up the next generation of Hollywood movies.

It struck me recently how few classic SF novelists have been particularly well-served by Hollywood. No Asimov novels on the screen, no A E Van Vogt, no Jack Williamson, no Edmond Hamilton, no Henry Kuttner. These were the giants in the playground of science fiction in the Golden Age whose ideas have been tapped time and time again, whether indirectly, as in *Star Wars*, which was pure pulp adventure, or directly, as in *Alien* which was effectively Van Vogt's *Discord in Scarlet* finally committed to celluloid.

We're not talking plagiarism here, but ideas that have seeped into the collective consciousness of SF writers and fans, and thence into the world. Old ideas are expanded upon, new twists added, but the basics were all there in the 1940s; in fact, the only significant science fictional idea created since has been the concept of cyberspace, most others having come from the world of real science.





There are very few big movies coming out of the mainstream of science fiction: *Starship Troopers*, from the novel by Robert Heinlein, and *Deep Impact*, based partly on Arthur C Clarke's *The Hammer of God*, are admittedly recent examples; but authors like Heinlein and Clarke already have a movie pedigree. Most producers realise that the difficulty of adapting modern SF novels to the screen is usually down to their sophistication – they are, after all, the end products of 100 years of genre writing. A return to the old pulps might yield a significant number of great old stories, timeless in their quality, but with the ability to create special effects advancing daily, now possible to make at reasonable costs.

Some of science fiction's greats do seem to be making a comeback. With Clarke's *Rendezvous with Rama* being developed by actor Morgan Freeman and a slew of Heinlein projects on the boards – recent pickups have included *Glory Road*, *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, *Space Cadets*, *Star Beast* and *Stranger in a Strange Land* – other authors are now being looked to for inspiration.

One ever-useful source is Philip K Dick, whose stories yielded *Bladerunner* and *Total Recall*, two of the movies' great SF moments. Miramax picked up the rights to produce a sequel to the latter, which they hope to make with Jonathan Frakes (of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* fame) and Arnold Schwarzenegger... maybe. When originally announced, the story was to be based on Dick's "Minority Report," although that was some time ago. A Dick adaptation will, however, appear in the trilogy of stories known as *Alien Love Triangle*, being shot by different directors for Dimension Films, about the relationships between humans and aliens. "Impostor," the second of the three stories, is directed by Gary Fleder and stars Gary Sinise, Madeleine Stowe, Vincent D'Onofrio and Tony Shalhoub. Two more Dick projects are in development: Touchstone Pictures have *Paycheck*, about a man who has part of his memory erased, but slowly begins to discover clues to what he has been up to for the past two years, and Australian director Emma-Kate Croghan has *A Scanner Darkly* in the works, a surreal futuristic work about a narcotics agent hooked on drugs, which is being developed for Universal.

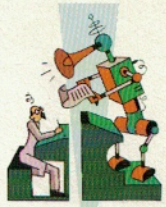
Although something of a maverick in the old school, Dick was at least mainstream SF. Not as mainstream as Isaac Asimov, whose two great projects, the *Foundation* series and his 'Robot' stories are both hopefully headed for screens. The former is being produced by Charles Roven and Robert Cavallo at New Line, although progress may have been held up with the death of Executive Producer Dawn Steel; the latter, based on Asimov's four-novel series about a New York detective and a humanoid robot which included *The Caves of Steel* and *The Naked Sun*, are being turned into mini-series by the same people – Richard Rubinstein and Mitchell Galin – who produced Stephen King's *The Stand*. But first off the block will be an adaptation of Asimov's multiple-award winning story *The Bicentennial Man*, which is being hatched by Robin Williams and director Christopher Columbus. The story, adapted by Nick Kazan, relates how, after 200 years of service, a robot tries to gain human status.

Asimov's contemporary L Ron Hubbard is now better known as the late founder of the Church of Scientology, but back in the Forties he was one of the brightest stars on the SF horizon. His early novel *To the Stars* is in development by producers Barbara Boyle and Michael Taylor (whose credits include *Phenomenon*) at Touchstone, adapted by Steve DeJarnatt, whilst scientologist John Travolta is trying to bring a number of Hubbard novels to Hollywood, notably the psychological horror story *Fear*, and *Battlefield Earth*, adapting Hubbard's doorstop novel of alien invasion. The latter has landed at Fox 2000, written by J D Shapiro, and Travolta will produce and maybe star.

A $50 million adaptation of Alfred Bester's award-winning *The Stars my Destination* (aka *Tiger! Tiger!*) has been on the books at Fox for some time, adapted by David Giler and William Wisher for director Paul Anderson (whose *Soldier* should be out later this year). The story concerns the idiot Gully Foyle, abandoned to die on a derelict spaceship. He manages to transport himself to the relative safety of a crumbling 25th century society, which predates many cyberpunk images by 30 years, where he avenges himself, becoming a quasi-Superman in the process. It's the perfect example of an older title (dating from 1956) that movie audiences can now appreciate over 40 years later.

A little deep digging could unearth plenty of other gems: imagine the fun CGI departments could have with the world-crashing novels of Edmond Hamilton, or the action-packed *Legion of Space* series of Jack Williamson. Perfect popcorn fodder, as timeless as a Chapman movie. There were giants on the Earth in those days...

STEVE HOLLAND IS A FREELANCE WRITER, EDITOR AND MOVIE-MEDIA NEWSHOUND.



ME AND HILDEGARD OF BINGEN

Visions may not be the sole province of the saintly. DAVID LANGFORD discovers that he has a surprising amount in common with a saintly abbess of the 12th century.

Making contact across a gulf of time can be a deeply weird sensation. Abbess Hildegard of Bingen was a very religious lady who lived in, well, Bingen in the 12th century, and specialised in mystic visions of the Celestial City. Like a tourist taking snapshots, she carefully sketched its glowing architecture – preserved for the ages as woodcuts in her books *Scivias* (circa 1180) and *Liber divinorum operum*, the Book of Divine Works.

I was introduced to Hildegard by Bob Shaw, the skilled and popular science fiction writer who died early in 1996. The first Shaw SF novel I read, long before meeting him, was his 1969 *The Two-Timers*, whose hero has what you might call visions of the Celestial City and (after library research into past visionaries, including Hildegard and Blaise Pascal) develops his insight into a means of time travel.

It turned out that Bob's reason for using this rather odd basis for SF hand-waving about slippage through time was that approximately twice a year he used to see those visions of the Celestial City and had researched them in the library. Cannibalising interesting bits of autobiography is one of the things all writers do...

Here the page ripples and wavers to denote the passing of many years, during which I forgot all about Hildegard and *The Two-Timers*, until one day the Celestial City sneaked up behind me with a well-weighted cosh. It was one of those sessions when I'd been overdoing the freelance writing a trifle – eight hours solid at the word processor, as emphatically not recommended by doctors – and paused for some chore like addressing an envelope. This proved difficult, because all of a sudden there was something shimmering and multi-coloured between my eyes and the paper... a kaleidoscopic light-show, rippling and growing to obscure the remnants of my ploughed-up field of vision.

This seemed an excellent time to panic. Had alien greys implanted radioactive devices in my eyes? Were orbital mind control lasers insidiously taking over my visual cortex? Or was it just a dose of perfectly ordinary hallucination, DTs or detached retina? None of the options seemed altogether encouraging.

CITY CENTRED: Hildegard was driven to draw her Celestial City.

What eventually stopped me gibbering with fear was a memory of Bob Shaw and Hildegard of Bingen... and the realisation that without recognising it, I was seeing Hildegard's Celestial City. The flickering stained-glass blur had a jagged border, full of re-entrant angles, rather like a ground plan of old-style military fortifications. Someone in the 18th century had indeed named these images 'fortification figures': Dr John Fothergill, who attributed them to eating too much buttered toast for breakfast. Other names, usefully listed in Bob's novel, included *teichopsia* and scintillating *scotoma* – that is, a (temporary) blind spot that appeared lit up rather than dark.

In fact, what Bob and Hildegard had had all their lives and I'd just met for the first time was *hemicrania sine dolore*, the posh way of saying a half-head headache without the actual headache – or, to put it less obscurely, classical migraine lacking the usual pain and nausea. Instead, there's often a feeling of intense oddness... like *jamais vu*, the sense of never having been here before, even when 'here' is a familiar place.

Hildegard had religiously assembled her pictures of the fortified Celestial City from fragments of these glittering visions. She drew other apocalyptic images based on what modern medics identify as known variations on the *hemicrania sine dolore* light-show: for example, a sinister shower of black stars or negative *scotomas*. Some of the most telling of the resulting woodcuts are reproduced in Oliver Sacks' *Migraine* and *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*.

It is, of course, incumbent on forteans to be distrustful of brisk scientific explaining-away – though 'migraine' isn't a full explanation, since the root causes remain obscure. (A Doctor Writes: "Er, it's vascular, innit?") The curious thing about Hildegard's visions is that instead of the usual nausea and pain, or the peculiar disorientation I get myself, she enjoyed waves of rapturous, religious ecstasy. Devout Christians would presumably think it entirely reasonable that God should use the mechanisms of migraine to enlighten Hildegard. Others might see the lesson as being that plenty of internal effects can mess with one's head, before considering weird new external phenomena.

For myself, I confess to severe panic when my own 'rational' view of the world was jolted by the arrival of those marching coloured lights. Good old Bob Shaw and Abbess Hildegard provided a soothing explanation, and I'm eternally grateful. Now the visual disturbances are practically old friends, even if our encyclopædia does insultingly claim that "migraine aura without headache occurs mostly in elderly persons". Elderly? What do these ignorant doctors know?

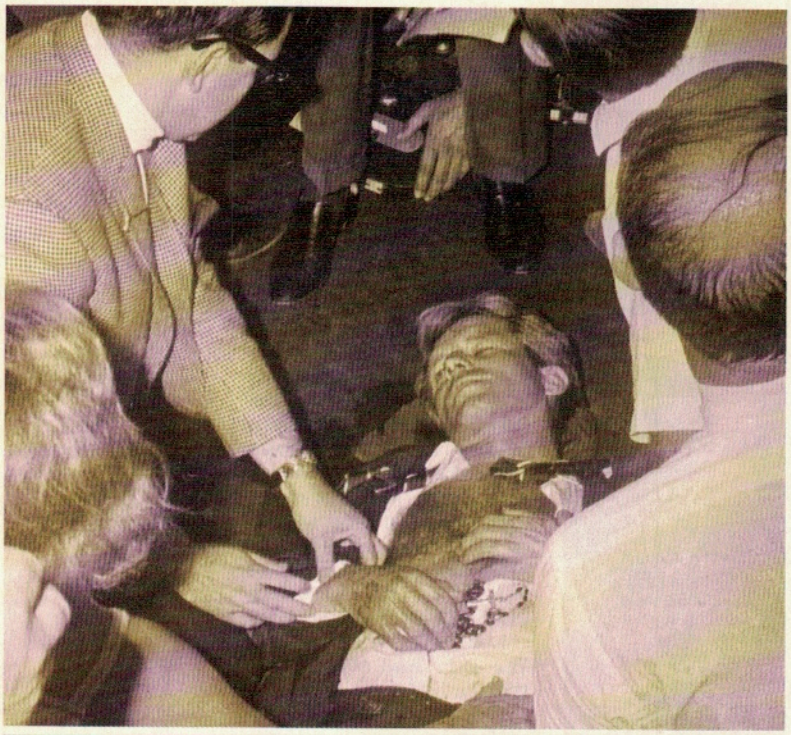
NUCLEAR PHYSICIST **DAVID LANGFORD** HAS NEVER LECTURED ON ROSWELL – BUT HE IS AN AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR, UFO HOAXER AND NOTED MAGAZINE COLUMNIST

RFK REDUX

While the scene of Robert Kennedy's assassination falls into disuse, the motives behind it are still the subject of intense scrutiny. KENN THOMAS wonders who was in control.

The Lorraine Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee, where Martin Luther King was shot, now houses a civil rights museum. In Dallas, the grassy knoll serves as a shrine to JFK and the Texas School Book Depository stands as a museum. At the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, however – where Robert Kennedy received his fatal bullet wounds on 5 June 1968 – weeds climb the walls of the boarded-up building. Barbed wire and chain-link fence keep prying eyes away.

Most agree that this has something to do with the nature of the crime, the last of the big three Sixties assassinations.



CORBIS

ASSASSINATED: Robert Kennedy lies fatally wounded by Sirhan in the Ambassador Hotel kitchens

The Ambassador took a downhill turn after RFK's death. Civic preservation groups tried to keep it alive for many years because of its long history – everyone from Rudolph Valentino to Howard Hughes hobnobbed there. The first Oscar awards were given out at the Ambassador; Richard Nixon worked on his Checkers speech there in 1952 and it housed the sequestered Charles Manson jurors in the 1970s. The legal wrangle that currently keeps it closed involves Donald Trump, who at one time wanted to build the world's tallest building on the site, and the Los Angeles Utilities School District, which wants to use it as a high school.

Conspiracy researchers would never let the study of Robert Kennedy's murder fall into similar disrepair, of course. During the recent 30th anniversary observance of the assassination, the Coalition on Political Assassinations (COPA) convened a regional conference at the lesser-known Claremont Hotel near the LAX airport. Candlelight vigils were held outside the Ambassador while a production crew, working on a movie entitled *Crazy in Alabama*, occupied the interior ruins.

Lisa Pease – who maintains a Real History Archives website at www.webcom.com/~lpease – provided the basic demonstration of the case against the official version of the assassination as an act performed by lone gunman Sirhan Sirhan. She stood behind another conference participant, Jim DiEugenio – whose group, Citizens for the Truth About the Kennedy Assassination, publishes a respected newsletter, *The Probe* (see www.webcom.com/~ctka) – and pointed her finger to the rear of his head.

This is where LA coroner Thomas Noguchi determined the bullets entered, at close enough range to leave powder burns behind Kennedy's ear. COPA organizer John Judge stood in front of DiEugenio at Sirhan's position, pointing his finger from the front at 5ft (1.5m) distance. This demonstration underscored the basic fact about RFK: he was shot from behind at close range. Sirhan shot eight bullets from the front, several feet away; 12 bullets were recovered. Eyewitnesses verify this; no 'magic bullet' theory has even been offered to explain it away.

From there, the RFK assassination takes on more bizarre aspects. My book, *Mind Control, Oswald and JFK*, explores the notion that Lee Harvey Oswald was hypnotically induced to kill JFK, using the history of electronic implant technology, some facts from newspaper reporting at the time and some unprovable rumours. With RFK, however, no less a primary source than the extant pages of Sirhan's notebook reflect the probability that he was a mind control victim, with its hypnotically repeated phrases, "RFK must die! RFK must die! RFK must die!" The case is so strong, in fact, that Sirhan's current lawyer, Lawrence Teeters, explained to COPA attendees that he plans to use it as a defense in any new trial.

Such a defense would be unique in the history of American courts. The only ruling that comes close to a successful mind control defense was that of Dan White, assassin of San Francisco mayor George Moscone and supervisor Harvey Milk. He was found innocent by reason of temporary insanity triggered by eating too much junk food – the 'Twinkie' defense.

Another famous assassin also suspected as the subject of mind control – Mark David Chapman, who killed John Lennon in 1981 – changed his plea to guilty, thereby avoiding a trial. He did this after receiving a visit from Dr Bernard Diamond, who also tested Sirhan's susceptibility to hypnosis.

I first explained this to Teeters in Memphis, pointing out the extraordinary coincidence of the two cases involving the same psychiatrist, separated by 13 years and a continent (Diamond practices in San Francisco; Chapman is in a New York prison). In Los Angeles, I agreed to send him the information on this from Fenton Bresler's hard to find 1989 book, *Who killed John Lennon?* Teeters hopes eventually to give his client a new day in court and present what would be ground-breaking defense.

Perhaps the mind control dimension of the RFK assassination offers a clue as to why the Ambassador has never exploited the tragedy for tourism. After all, convicted Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh claimed to have a mind control implant in his buttocks and the notion of mind control emerges time and again in rumours surrounding schoolyard shootings and child sex abuse cases. One extremely popular recent book, *Trance Formation of America* by Cathy O'Brien, reports upon a Stepford wives-type mind control operation involving sex slaves for the CIA.

If mind control is not really a current reality, it is certainly a popular fantasy, but not one likely to convince Los Angeles city fathers to bring the Ambassador out of mothballs.

KENN THOMAS PUBLISHES STEAMSHOVEL PRESS, A MAGAZINE OF CONSPIRACY AND PARAPOLITICS (www.umsl.edu/~skthoma). HIS CURRENT BOOK IS *FLYING SAUCERS OVER LOS ANGELES.*

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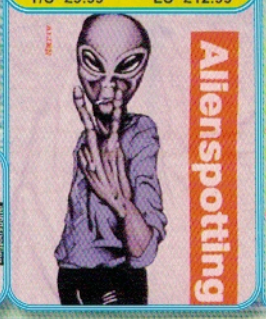

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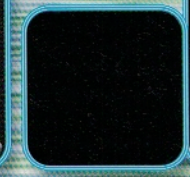

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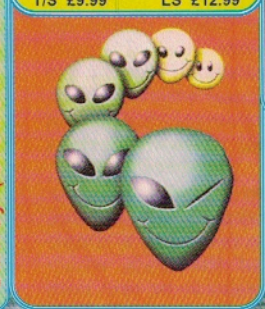

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ALL IN THE HEAD?

In his letter "TLE, CE4, ECT" [***FT112:50***], Mark Glover seems to ignore the fact that modern electro-convulsive therapy (ECT) is conducted while patients are anæsthetised and unable to experience anything during the procedure. Consequent disturbances in memory abilities are common.

During hallucinatory experiences, people are often unable to rationalise what is happening to them. Indeed, one of the aims of cognitive therapy with auditory hallucinations is for the subject to accept the internal source of seemingly external sounds and voices.[1] There are many examples of sleep deprived, covertly drugged, or terrified *single episode* hallucinators who would rate their experiences as 100 per cent objectively real.

In the experiment reported in ***FT108:25***, Dr Blackmore knew she was inside an electromagnetic helmet, but still experienced spatio-temporal distortion and very real fear. Imagine what she might have attributed the feelings of being yanked upright and stretched up the wall to if she had not been aware of the strong electromagnetic field inside her skull.

Of course, the "they-were-crazy-at-the-time" hypothesis is a dangerously powerful counter-attack on any report of anomalous experience, but in order to support an alien visitation hypothesis then neurological events and psychotic episodes will have to be convincingly screened out of the data.

WILL CLARK
Bolton, Lancashire

1. Chadwick, P. & Birchwood, M. (1994) "The Omnipotence of Voices: A cognitive approach to auditory hallucinations", *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 164, 190-201

EL CHUPACABRAS

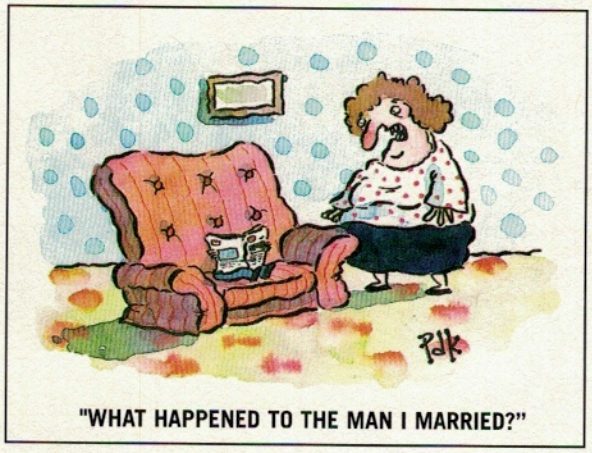
I hate to be picky, but since *The Fortean Times* is so much more intelligent, unpretentious and just plain interesting than any other magazine currently in existence, I thought you'd like to know: The singular of the Spanish name of the Goat-sucker is *El Chupacabras*, with an 's,' not *El Chupacabra*. I'd like to think it's only non-Spanish-speakers who get it wrong, but alas, such is not the case (they even got it wrong on *The X-Files*, and Chris Carter is from California, for God's sake).

A lot of native Spanish speakers seem to be confused about it, too – but that doesn't make it right to leave the 's' off. After all, just because everyone seems to be putting apostrophes in English plurals these days, it doesn't mean it's right.

JANE R. ZASTAURY
Tucson, Arizona

BIRTH OF A NEW FOAFTALE

Your news item "Chest Injuries" [***FT111:17***] with a byline from the *Hong Kong Standard* (8 Mar 1998) was actually one of 10 items written by me for a monthly "Top Ten" column which appeared in the January 1996 issue of *Exotic Magazine* (http://www.xmag.com/) and is reprinted in full in my own web archive: http://www.teleport.com/~pelatort/cols.htm. As with my other "Top Ten" articles, it is completely fabricated, not a clipping from an existing newspaper.



"WHAT HAPPENED TO THE MAN I MARRIED?"

EDWARD MARTIN III
Portland, Oregon

NOT A VIRUS

The "Anthrax Terrorists" [***FT110:46***] report used the phrase "possession of the deadly Anthrax virus". Anthrax is not a virus, it is a bacterium. This fundamental error irritates the hell out of me. I have come to expect it from tabloid newspapers, but from *Fortean Times* I expect better.

KAREN COVER
West Drayton, Middlesex

FOLLOW THAT RAT

The letter about sheep near Hereford seen walking in parallel lines [***FT112:51***] reminded me of a story told to me by my 80-year-old father-in-law. When he was a young man working on a farm near Tal-y-Bont in Brecon, he saw dozens and dozens of rats moving across a field in one black mass led by a white rat. He watched this strange spectacle with some trepidation; it reminds me of the story of the Pied Piper. The Tal-y-Bont valley was flooded for a reservoir, but I don't think this was connected to the rats' behaviour. Has anyone seen or heard of anything similar?

R B WILLIAMS
Talgarth, Powys

SENSES TAKER

Antonio Melechi [***FT113:28-31***] seems to be a little confused about synæsthesia and as someone who has lived with the condition all his life, I feel qualified to correct him on a few points. First, those subjects reporting symptoms of synæsthesia while under the influence of mind-altering drugs are not genuinely experiencing the condition, but are merely hallucinating. Also, true synæsthesia does not produce feelings of euphoria. As far as the subject is concerned, the effects of the condition are a perfectly normal and natural occurrence.

It was not until I reached 27 that I became aware that others did not share my experiences and I was deeply saddened to learn that most people cannot see sounds at all. I simply cannot imagine what it must be like to only hear music without experiencing its accompanying visual effects. You all have my deepest sympathies!

The theories concerning evolutionary throwbacks are invalid. Synæsthesia is caused by a simple malfunction of the brain which causes audio input to be sent both to the part of the brain which deals with sound and to the part which handles vision.

JOHN F HARPER
Ashington, Northumberland

The earliest record of synæsthesia may be in Exodus 20:18: "And all the people saw the thunderings and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking..." during the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. The traditional Jewish interpretation of this verse is "They saw what was heard (the thunder), which can't normally be seen" – Mechilta quoted in commentary by Rashi (1040-1105). A wonderful religious experience is thus linked to synæsthesia.

ZVI RON
Richmond, Virginia

PETER A. KING

DA VINCI LOOKS ON?

In the picture accompanying your recent item on cannibalism [***FT113:16***], I was surprised to see Leonardo da Vinci standing behind the feast and giving the famous "John Gesture". Could this be a comment on how he saw the human race?

PAUL CHINN
Coventry, Warks.

SKY DIAMONDS

On the afternoon of 3 February 1998, at 4:10pm I happened to glance through the lounge window and saw a group of strange moving lights in the northwest sky heading west approximately 1–1.5 miles (1.6–2.4km) away, at an altitude of about 2,000ft (610m). There were three diamond-shaped objects travelling quite quickly, and they either had undulating body surfaces, were rotating, or the light source was pulsating. The sky was clear with just the odd cloud.

I called my wife over to the window, and we watched the objects together for about one minute. They then passed through a cloud and I lost them, but my wife picked them up again briefly before they vanished behind a house in the middle distance. We were both completely baffled as they were unlike anything we had ever seen before.

We are well used to normal aircraft passing overhead, as we have a large helicopter training base just a few miles away, and frequent aircraft from Manchester airport and the cross-Atlantic routes overhead. We were both quite convinced that our sighting was not sunlight gleaming on aircraft fuselage, as we are quite familiar with this.

JON ELLISON
Whitchurch, Shropshire

LUNAR CROSSING

After reading Peter Grego's article "Alien Moon" [***FT112:26-29***], a mystery was solved for me. In the early 1980s my best friend and I saw a huge bridge-like structure on the Moon (which matched John O'Neill's description in the article). We had no interest in ufology and we both believed it to be a natural phenomenon.

The mystery for me was why no astronomers had seen this "bridge". But Grego's article showed clearly that if they had seen it, peer pressure would have stopped them from admitting it to their colleagues. That's a pity, because if – as Grego implies – it is an optical illusion, it's one of the best; and if it's a natural phenomenon, it certainly deserves further investigation. I would be interested to know if any other readers have seen it or even have a photo of this illusive "bridge".

CLIVE GEE
Welshpool, Powys

INSIDE THE PYRAMID

I noted with interest the side panel "Flex, Lies and Videotape" in the Egyptian archæology feature [***FT112:34-39***]. It seems to be repeating information that was previously given in the *Daily Mail* on 18 April 1998. One of the researchers quoted in the article (Simon Cox) subsequently issued a statement to the effect that the article's claims of secret chambers did not come from him or his associates. He wanted to highlight the fact that work of some kind seemed to be under way inside the Great Pyramid, but made no claims as to its nature.

On 6 June 1998, I visited Dr Hawass at his office and requested permission to enter the Great Pyramid. He kindly agreed. On leaving the King's Chamber, I noticed that the grille referred to in the article was unlocked. I opened it and entered the passage that is causing so much speculation. This passage was originally excavated by Caviglia in the 1830s or 1840s and follows the route of the King's Chamber north air shaft for a short distance.

I went right to the end of the passage and can categorically state that: the brick wall installed as part of Gantenbrink's ventilation scheme was completely intact; the ventilation fan was still *in situ*; there was no way to proceed or see beyond the wall short of knocking it down; and there was no evidence whatever to indicate that any secret digging had been taking place inside the passage. It has been reported that a power lead can be seen leading into the tunnel. This is true. It provides the power to Gantenbrink's ventilator fan.

In short, I don't believe that any secret work has been taking place in Caviglia's passage, or at least there was no sign of it as of 6 June 1998.

The complete text of Simon Cox's rebuttal of the original article can be found at http://wkweb5.cableinet.co.uk/nigelss/pages/chambers.htm

NIGEL SKINNER-SIMPSON
Chelmsford, Essex

NOT A FAD

Surely Jan Bondesen is wrong in stating that lactational heredity was a "ridiculous fad" [***FT108:30***]. Milk from a lactating woman might well contain substances that she is putting into her body. Drugs, alcohol, nicotine – don't these all pass through the milk into the baby ? We also know that, during this period of rapid growth, the effects of toxins are more noticeable in the baby.

Furthermore, if the mother or wetnurse isn't healthy, then the milk isn't going to contain as many vitamins and nutrients as it could do. So it's reasonable to assume that the quality of milk a baby gets from an alcoholic wet-nurse will be poorer than that of a healthy woman.

What you eat is what you are, and we're only beginning to realise what various artificial foods, additives and such like can do to you. It might just have predisposed the growing prince to a life of alcoholic debauchery.

SHED A LITTLE LIGHT ON IT: Leanne's drawing of the mystery lights.

RED SKY AT NIGHT

In 1988, my husband and I were driving through the extensive farming area called Bayles in Victoria, Australia. Around 9pm we noticed a brilliant red mist to the right of us, high up in the sky. It was extremely dark outside and the red mist was so bright it was breathtaking. Underneath, two distinct "rays" emanated downwards, but at no time did they reach the ground (see picture). The lights were stationary and there was no sound.

At first we thought the "rays" were some kind of large spotlight, but this couldn't be because there was no light coming from the ground.

The whole spectacle was extremely large and seemed to be about three miles (5km) away. My husband, who knew the area well, tried driving closer, but it seemed that no matter how far we moved the lights remained at the same distance. We eventually gave up and went to his parents' house a five-minute drive away. Someone has suggested that what we saw was the Southern Aurora which, unlike the Northern Aurora, is very rarely seen – a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

LEANNE HOMICKI
Wonthaggi, Victoria

We have countless folk-beliefs about how mothers milk affects the child. Sure, the cause we can dispute – we prefer to think in terms of vitamin deficiency and developmental retardation rather than demonic influence or maternal shocks. But the effects are the same, and our forebears were no less sharp than we are in observing their environment. So let's not think we know it all and are exempt from "ridiculous fads".

More fortean forbearance, please!

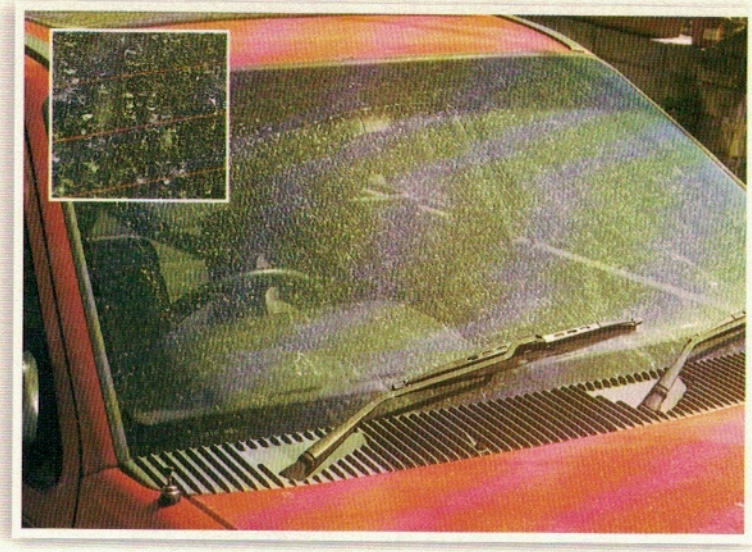
GEOFF CUNNER
Geoff.Cunner@gb.swissbank.com

WHOLE LOTTA JELLY

I was interested in your report of "an enormous, newly-discovered species of jellyfish" [***FT112:16***]. It measured 3ft (1m) across the bell, and trailed tentacles 20ft (6m) long. It has been named *Chrysaora achlyos* from the Greek "achlys" meaning mist, darkness and obscurity.

By 1988 an even larger medusa, or jellyfish, was already known. The Arctic jellyfish *Cyanea capillata arctica*, of the NW Atlantic, was occasionally washed up on the NW US coast. A specimen discovered in Massachusetts Bay had a bell diameter of 7ft 6in (2.29m) and tentacles trailing 120ft (36.6m). In British waters, a related species holds the record – the lion's mane jellyfish or common sea blubber (*Cyanea capillata*). Bell diameters of 35.8in (91cm), with tentacles stretching over 45ft (13.7m) have been recorded.

NICHOLAS WARREN
Greenford, Middlesex



RAINING SAND

We found a thin layer of reddish dust all over our car in Calenick, Truro, Cornwall, on 20 June. All the other cars in the village were similarly coated, as were others in Truro and Redruth. My family in Hampshire also had dust all over their car that morning. Meteorologists said it was a deposit of Sahara sand, the second in the West Country and Wales this year; but I've heard at least one conspiracy rumour that it was a military exercise to map possible spread of fall-out in the event of an enemy attack!

DIONNE JONES
Calenick, Cornwall

OPEN THE BOX

I recently found a clipping from the *Sunday Express* dated 19 Dec 1971 which reported the purchase of Whittington Castle, Shropshire, by Andrea Lloyd. The 25-year-old actress and model had the following to say: "There is a legend about the castle that concerns the owner. I don't want to say exactly what it is because it concerns my life. It involves a certain object in the castle being opened. If it is opened the castle owner will die. I was thinking of X-raying it. It might be filled with gold which would be nice but I'm certainly not taking any risks. I'm not terribly superstitious normally but apparently 'it' was opened about 100 years ago and the owner did die." Can anyone shed more light on this? Or was it the *Sunday Express* hyping up a story to get a photo of the shapely Ms Lloyd on its pages?

JOE GARDINER
Balham

GHOST PATROL

In 1947 I was posted to Darwin, capital of the Northern Territory. Darwin was regarded as the gateway to Australia, and had suffered a considerable amount of damage by Japanese aircraft during the war. In 1947, the population was around 6,000, so it was not crowded. There had been a large RAAF base, but most of the aircraft and personnel had been removed. However, there were still some operational aircraft which were frequently seen and heard, so that the sound or sight of an aircraft didn't arouse interest.

I was a member of the Quantas Airway ground staff, and there were about 100 of us living in converted army barracks nine miles (15km) out of Darwin. In those days, there was very little development other than in Darwin, and consequently I spent most of my off-duty time bush walking and sketching the wildlife.

Some few weeks after I arrived, I was out in the bush when I heard an aircraft that sounded unusual. I cannot recall if it sounded laboured, was cutting out, or what the problem was, but it was sufficiently unusual that I stopped sketching and stood up to get a better look. The aircraft was flying at not much above tree height, and would pass almost directly overhead. It was a PBY or Catalina flying boat like those which had been used extensively on coastal patrols during the war and had a well deserved reputation for reliability. As it passed overhead, I noticed two distinctly odd features: the port blister was armed with the gunner quite visible, his weapon at the ready, and the port engine was missing. When I say missing, I mean in the physical sense, not the electrical, as where the engine would normally be, there was only a gaping hole. It was just as though the fitters had forgotten to reinstall an engine that had been removed for repairs.

The aircraft continued on its way and I eventually lost sight of it over the mangroves bordering a tidal inlet. I continued to hear it for quite some time after until the sound eventually faded.

Over the next few months I saw the same aircraft on probably a dozen occasions, each time coming from the same direction, sometimes nearer to me than on others, but in every case, there was no mistaking that it was the same aircraft. By this time, I had become so used to seeing it, that I knew the registration numbers, but time has erased these from my memory.

I must emphasise that I did not at any time regard viewing the aircraft as being odd, the only unusual aspect being that it was obviously on wartime readiness and that, for some reason, the technicians had not refitted the missing engine.

Then I happened to mention my sightings to a RAAF officer who was having a drink with us in the canteen. The subject came up only because we were talking about the relative reliability of various aircraft. The officer was at the time attached to RAAF Darwin and was familiar with all operational aircraft in the area. He was adamant that no such aircraft was currently flying and certainly not one with only one engine. The subject must have intrigued him, for he contacted me some days later and confirmed that no aircraft of that registration was flying or operational within Australia. It was only then that I realised that I appeared to be the only person to have seen the craft, although a number of the staff were ex-RAAF personnel and naturally took more of an interest in aircraft than others who did not have that sort of background.

Following the discussion with the officer, I never saw or heard the aircraft again, although I was in the area for a couple more years. I am told by aircraft technicians that although the Catalina had a good one-engine performance, this would hardly apply to take-off and continued operation, particularly where there was a great gaping hole which would cause monumental instability.

If I had seen the craft but once, it is probable that I could be mistaken, but to see it frequently, and at close quarters, rather rules that out. I can but conclude that it was just another casualty of war, the difference being that this crew were determined to continue their patrol, at least until such time as they received recognition.

MERVYN F W NIGHTINGALE
Londonderry, New South Wales

KIDDIE SLAYINGS

The well-balanced 'Boys and Girls Come Out to Slay' [***FT111:44–45***] shows how a clutch of American teenagers fantasised various justifications to commit murder. You point out that the fundamentalist hobby-horse of fantasy games is not to blame because millions of kids do that and aren't compelled to kill. You then move on to ask what went wrong. I would have thought it obvious.

These predominantly Bible-belt teenagers are products of the Satan Generation. They were toddlers in the 1980s when the first Satanic ritual abuse (SRA) scares were being invented in the USA. They are the first generation which has reached adolescence bombarded with a virtually daily diet of irrational and irresponsible SRA allegations by the media.

What we have here are copycats of crimes which originally never took place but which these kids think did. After 10 years of Satanic/cult scares which have been mined by an industry of social workers, therapists, TV encounter shows, the makers of movies and documentaries, newspapers, magazines and novelists, I am surprised that it has

taken so long for some teenage rebels to step into the stereotypes created for them. Not one genuine SRA case has ever been uncovered. It is probably the biggest myth of modern times.

The fact that the first kid crimes have occurred within Bible belt communities which, following the Satan scares, are more likely to clamp down on their rebellious teenagers and deny them those things which are most abominated (ie fantasy games, heavy metal music, New Age books, alchemical jewellery, Goth fashion etc) can be seen as part of the self-fulfilling prophecy which will actually lead some of them to commit such terrible crimes.

There is a massive load of case evidence to show that thousands of killers have justified their crimes by saying that God made them do it, or that they were following strictures laid down in the Bible. The Yorkshire Ripper killed for God and so have many other serial killers.

What we are looking at here is a move to identify every aspect of youth culture as Satanic and a concerted attempt to suppress it by people whose religious devotion compels them to seek out examples of Satanic activity as a sign that Armageddon is approaching. We at the SAFF (Sub-Culture Alternatives Freedom Foundation) foresaw this 10 years ago and this is why we have consistently fought to present the rational debate – the only cure for this type of hysteria. So if anyone wants background to burst the Satan myth they should send a SAE.

TONY RHODES
Trustee, SAFF, 31 Kings Avenue, Leeds LS6 1QP Yorkshire.
Tel/Fax: (0113) 2451309

GROWING SAINT

I quote from a book called *Alone Through the Forbidden Land* by an Austrian, Gustav Krist (1939, Readers Union Ltd, by arrangement with Faber and Faber Ltd). Krist was in the service of a Persian carpet trader, and in 1923 travelled undercover through Persia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Somewhat foolishly, he travels to Samarkand, where he had been held as a prisoner of war some years earlier. One night he visits the grave of Tamerlane, under a "green slab of jade, the largest block of such nephritic crystal that the world has seen", where he meets an old mullah who offers to show him another grave.

"My interest in the history of Samarqand rejoiced the old man, and he for his own part questioned me about my religion. When I told him I was a Christian, he asked if he might show me the grave of Daniel (Daniel of the Den of Lions). Years before, I had heard of this mysterious grave and I said I should be delighted to ride out to it that very night. We were soon mounted on two riding donkeys of the mulla's, and as they trotted off into the desert we encouraged them with guttural cries of 'Khr-khr!' [...]

"The time passed so quickly as we conversed, that I was surprised when the mulla pulled up his donkey and pointed ahead. A low sarcophagus, some nine feet six inches [3m] long, lay there in the desert sand. According to legend, Daniel's body is steadily growing longer, and when it reaches a certain size he is to rise again. Behind the grave the ground fell away abruptly and in the loose cliff there was built a niche with shallow stone basins in which pious pilgrims place food for the dead saint. At the head of the grave, which is turned towards the west, there stand high poles with black horse-tails, at the foot is a bronze tablet with a Kufic inscription, while loose stones lie about, which are displaced as Daniel grows. These roughly hewn stones enclose a rectangle of about fourteen feet [4.3m] by three feet six inches [1m]. Some of the stones bear primitive representations of fish, just such drawings as the followers of Jesus scratched in the sand as a sign of mutual recognition during the persecution of the Christians in Rome.

"The mulla told me that Daniel grows half an inch [1.27cm] or so every year, and every year the rectangle of stones has to be slightly enlarged. The sacred tree stands not far off, whose touch is reputed to cure leprosy. I tried to extract from my companion some more information about the cult of Daniel, but that was all that he could tell me. He himself knew nothing more. What he did know he had learned as a boy in the Ulugh Beg Madrasah and his teacher knew nothing further either. Is it possible that the legends which locate the Garden of Eden in the neighbourhood of Samarqand are something more than legends?

"Night was already merging into the grey twilight of morning when I dismounted from my donkey at the Gur I Amir and bade the mulla goodbye. The town was beginning to wake up as I walked back to it on foot..."

ROBIN SOMES
Fawley, Hampshire

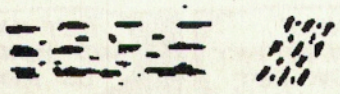
Editor's note: A Carreras cigarette card from an old series of Ripley's Believe It Or Not bears the inscription: "The mysterious growing grave in Samarkand. The sarcophagus of St Daniar [sic] is constantly growing. It is now 60 feet [sic!] long."

ASTONISHING

On this planet Earth there are animals made of flesh and bones and, in our atmosphere, there are animals made of living matter and gas: gaseous animals. Gaseous animals inhabit our close atmosphere, and move easily and undetected over people's heads and near their bodies.

Gaseous animals are more easy to see when the light is not so bright, like on a cloudy day but, to see a gaseous animal, human beings need special glasses or lenses that enable them to scan the air for a long range but, more especially, for a close range.

How does a gaseous animal look?



It looks like this – a 3x2ft (1x0.6m) rectangular or a 4x1ft (1.2x0.3m) horizontal mass of gas and inside of it, a multitude of tiny gray "needles". These gray "needles" move up and down slowly and incessantly.

Other particulars? A gaseous animal is ultrasonic, a visual photographer, an exact reproducer of sounds and smells and a projector of images or surroundings in dark or in colour. Can learn and understand a language to a satisfactory per cent of accuracy and is a producer and a releaser of energy. It is oviparous. A gaseous animal is also an exact reproducer and a projector of human beings' sensations and emotions: like pleasure, joy, love and also pain, anguish, fear, desperation and hate.

I respectfully ask you to consider my words. This is not a joke or an insanity. It is a fact. Of the fauna of the air, in a period of 12 years, I have seen and studied two kinds of gaseous animals. I know that, upon the discovery of gaseous animals, many people will make millions and, many others, will do great things and all for the benefit of humankind.

Another view of the gaseous animals.

DORA WHIBOURN
Trinidad

Editor's note: We've cheated here. This letter was not sent to FT, *but appeared in the* Trinidad Express *on 25 November 1997 under the section called "Public Forum"; but we just had to share it with our readers!]*

EASTERN BLOOM

I was not greatly astonished by the report that the tulip has been claimed as a Chinese plant [***FT113:10***]. It only became a "European flower" after a Dutch explorer brought bulbs from its Central Asian source a few centuries ago. I understand it was called a "tulip" because of its resemblance to the Turkish "turban". Turkish dialects are spoken along a broad band of territory stretching from Europe to western China (that is, Chinese Turkestan), technically part of the Central Asian source of the tulip.

LESLIE BANKS
London

PHENOMENOMIX

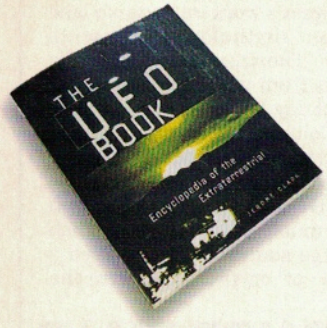
HUNT EMERSON and JOHN TAIT

©98

SEVERAL THOUSAND YEARS AGO...
BURP
WHAT THE...? LOOK AT MY TABLE!
OUT! GET OUT, THE LOT OF YOU! DIRTY, DRUNKEN SHOWER-GO ON—CLEAR OFF!
I'M SICK OF YOU AND YOUR USELESS CRONIES RUINING MY COFFEE TABLES! JUST LOOK AT THE MARKS YOUR BEER MUGS HAVE LEFT ON IT! I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU CAN DRINK THAT STUFF, SEEING WHAT IT DOES TO THE STONE...
SSSSS
...AND LOOK HERE! HOLES BURNED IN BY CIGARETTES!
WELL YOU CAN GET OUT TOO, AND DON'T COME BACK 'TIL YOU'VE GOT A JOB!
BONK!
SEVERAL THOUSAND YEARS PASS...
...AS, LEFT TO THEMSELVES, THEY WILL.
WOW! LOOK—"CUP AND RING" MARKS!
THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO BE PREHISTORIC STAR MAPS, YOU KNOW, SHOWING STARS WITH PLANETS... AND THE HOLES ARE GALAXIES AND QUASARS!
WOW! HOW DID THEY KNOW THAT, MAN?
THEY HAD KNOWLEDGE AND POWERS LOST TO US NOW!
YEAH... A SIMPLER AND WISER PEOPLE...

MULTIMEDIA REVIEWS PAGE 60

ENCYCLOPÆDIA GALACTICA



THE UFO BOOK: AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL

JEROME CLARK

Visible Ink/Gale, Detroit, MI 48226, USA. 1997, pb $19.95, pp705, index. ISBN 1-57859-029-9.

For most of this decade, Jerome Clark has been compiling his great *UFO Encyclopedia* and last year the three volumes published between 1990–1996 were united, revised and expanded in a second edition. It is one of the many frustrations of a fortean researcher's life that a valuable resource like this should be priced beyond the grasp of mere mortals. Gale are to be congratulated for recognising the need for an affordable edition that would place Clark's considerable scholarship and unrivalled knowledge of the subject before a wider readership.

And here we have it. *The UFO Book* is a fat, solid brick of a book, compiled from that three-volume encyclopædia and adapted to be a clear and readable reference work in its own right. It is a worthy foundation for discovering or rediscovering a topic infamous for being concealed within clouds of dubious and illusory data.

Jerry is, first and foremost, a fortean – since his earliest writings for *FATE* magazine and others in the 1960s – which makes his comprehensive approach to ufology more valuable to forteans. Jerry is also a leading ufologist, a long-standing member of the board of the Hynek Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS) and editor of its *International UFO Reporter*.

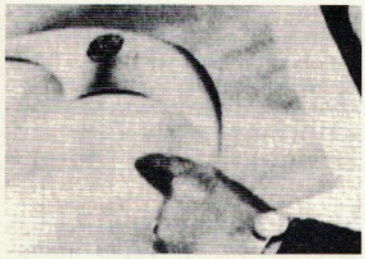
Just three paragraphs into the tome we find an acknowledgement that Charles Fort was the first to study what we know today as the UFO phenomenon in its general diversity. This introduces a short overview of the history ufology that, if space permitted, could have been much longer.

While the layout of entries is alphabetical and the entries cross-referenced so that particular threads can be followed as desired, the newcomer is not equipped to know where to begin. Seasoned ufologists will recognise key case names (Kenneth Arnold, Mantell, Pascagoula, JAL, Exeter, Falcon Lake, Gulf Breeze, Valentich and so on) but someone coming to it fresh needs the guidance that a more comprehensive general history could provide.

Even without such an introduction, there is no doubt that there is no other book to match this one on the market. Many others strive to present a broad history or an in-depth study, but Clark manages to pack in the best of both worlds. Among researchers and theorists, Hynek, Keyhoe, Fort, Menzel and Ruppelt have their own entries and many more are mentioned in passing or accessible through the index.

Major topics are profiled (abductions, the 'close encounter' classifications, radar and photographic cases, crashes, historical records and even sex), as are prominent abductions and contactees (the Hills,

CLARK'S CONSIDERABLE KNOWLEDGE PUT BEFORE A WIDER AUDIENCE



Adamski, the Mengers, Travis Walton, Dr X, Whitley Strieber, etc). The chief theories about the nature and origin of UFOs (extraterrestrial, psychosocial, hoax, paranormal and occult) are given their own entries although, curiously, theories of disinformation and so-called 'black' (military secret) projects are hidden under the heading 'Dark Side'.

As might be expected, there is general bias towards US ufology – eg where new words are introduced, the pronunciation guide looks very odd to European eyes (ufology: "yoo-FAHL-uh-gee") and sometimes bizarre (extraterrestrial biological entities or EBEs: "ee-BUHs"). Among the non-US cases with entries, Clark has selected just one or two each from France, New Zealand, England, Scotland, Mexico, Iran, Morocco and New Guinea; but many others, again, are accessible from the index if you know what to look up.

Clark even records (in third person) his own famous shifts of opinion when confronted with the paradoxical nature of much ufological data: "Unable to reconcile physical evidence and radar/visual sightings with hallucinations and visions, Clark called for a de-emphasis on high-strangeness cases and a cautious, scientifically based reexamination of the ETH." (p438). Effectively, this defines the fundamental difference of opinion between mainstream American ufology and the European-led '*Magonia*' view with their emphasis on psychology, sociology, anthropology and folklore.

A tense debate on this difference of approach and interpretation flared up recently on the 'UFO Updates' email forum which pitched Clark against the likes of Paul Devereux, John Rimmer and Peter Brookesmith. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to read any malice into the omission of any discussion of their particular contributions to ufology as there are many other notable omissions – eg Erling Strand's work on the Hessdalen 'balls of light' and Michael Persinger's work on UFO-like perceptions induced by electromagnetic fields.

These omissions do not detract from the value of this book and can be excused; at over 700 pages already, any more would have made it quite unmanageable. Besides, many of them are included in the original encyclopædia, which every public library should be pressed to carry.

Earlier this year, *The UFO Book* won the prestigious Benjamin Franklin Award for excellence in the Science/Environment category. One of the judges called it "A superb book!" and I agree. And at an affordable price, it's a bargain every fortean and ufologist ought to have.

BOB RICKARD

***FORTEAN TIMES** readers can buy copies of* **The UFO Book** *for the special price of £15.99 including p&p. See page 32 for full details.*

COMPETITION 61

UFO BOOK

When was the great American airship panic?

There are copies of **The UFO Book** for the first five people to spot the strange craft in the sky. One entry per person only, to reach us by 30 November, to the address on page 47.

RATING SYSTEM

- EXCELLENT
- GREAT
- GOOD
- FAIR
- BAD
- EXECRABLE

ALL BOOK PICTURES : LISA ANDERS

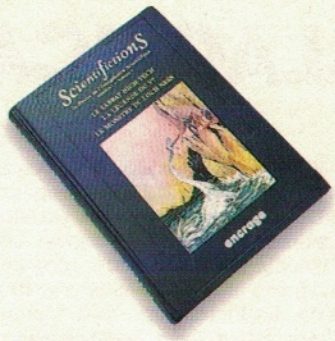
SURVIVING CATASTROPHIC EARTH CHANGES: A PRACTICAL GUIDE WITH COMMENTARY

G COPE SCHELLHORN

Horus House Press Inc., Madison, Wisconsin. 1994, pb £10.99, pp196, index, bib, photos. ISBN 1–8818–5208–3

Riding on the current wave of pre-millennium anxiety, this book offers a 'protect and survive' guide to the apocalypse and, inevitably, contains a fair smattering of New Age fervour. It is engaging in places, but let down by a snapshot statistical approach which ignores the wider record of geographical and meteorological catastrophes. It also neglects the issue of increased media coverage, which has a tendency to make all localised disasters global. So if you have a pessimistic view of planetary survival and an optimistic view of your own chances, then this one's for you.

JONATHAN BRYANT



SCIENTIFICTIONS: LA REVUE DE L'IMAGINAIRE SCIENTIFIQUE

JOSEPH ALTAIRAC AND MICHEL MEURGER, EDS

Interface collection, Encrage, Amiens. 1997, hb, pp254, notes, photos, illus. ISBN 2–9063–8984–6

Be in no doubt that there's more to France than Zinedine Zidane and his chums. This series is a worthy Gallic rival to JBP's own *Fortean Studies*. Volume 2 Number 1 – the latest of the *Scientifictions* series – has three articles: 'Electronic Satanism: The High-tech Sabbath' by Sherrill Mulhern; 'The V7 Legend: A Technological Myth' by Joseph Altairac; and 'The Loch Ness Monster: From Folklore to Speculative Zoology' by Michel Meurger.

Mulhern's article is a review of the recent research on Satanic ritual abuse in the USA. She links the scare stories – increasingly common in the American media – to the spin doctors of the Christian fundamentalists and the closely allied and growing anti-cult movement. Although the religious right are using the products of the information society, the atmosphere of hysteria they arouse is a throwback to the good old days of the Middle Ages. Mulhern – a hit at two successive UnConventions – argues in fact that these themes have an even older origin, from pre-Christian secret societies. Ultimately, Mulhern points to the dangers of conspiratorialism gone mad. A lesson to us all.

Altairac's article is a review and digest of the contemporary writings from the end of World War II that fuel the belief that the Germans developed a secret weapon in the shape of a flying saucer. He follows up reports that Nazi scientists, towards the end of the war, had tested the weapon, code named V7. At the time, there were wider worries in the West about German technology after the development of the V1 flying bombs and V2 rockets and so the reports gained widespread credence.

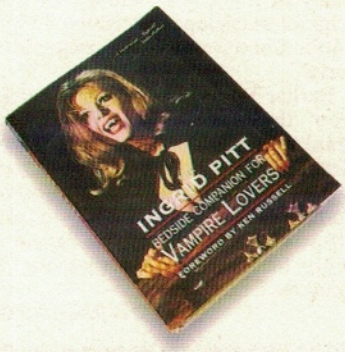
While focussing on the German engineer Rudolf Schriever, Altairac also digs up material on supersonic helicopters and a variety of other awesome 1950s vintage sci-fi weapons. He places them in the context of the cold war race to acquire the services of Nazi engineers and scientists and more recently attempts by Neo-Nazis to rekindle the mythology of Nazi supremacy. Altairac's sources are truly international and I have no doubt that an English translation and publication of this article would be welcomed by *Fortean Studies*' readership.

Meurger's work on Scottish lake monster mythology represents a *tour d'horizon* for our Gallic cousins from the dark ages to the present day. Starting with the 'Life of St Columba', written in the late 7th century, and coming right up to Meurger's own travels in Scotland. He has ploughed through pretty much all the major English language sources and produced a history of cryptozoology in the British Isles with references to the Lambton worm, an extensive diversion into Walter Scott, John Francis Campbell, David MacRitchie and the 20th century explosion of interest in Nessie. *FT*'s very own Mike Dash even gets a mention. Meurger's attitude comes across as one of detached amusement at the various battles over the existence or non-existence of the monster.

He has little doubt that it is in no-one's interest to solve the mystery and even less doubt that it will continue; that, as technology develops, ever more ingenious ways will be found of continuing the debate and the search. Overall, *Scientifictions* is a worthy and welcome addition to the Fortean library. Except, of course, that it's all in French

HE HAS LITTLE DOUBT THAT IT IS IN NO-ONE'S INTEREST TO SOLVE THE MYSTERY

RICHARD FURLONG



THE INGRID PITT BEDSIDE COMPANION FOR VAMPIRE LOVERS

BT Batsford, London. 1998, pb £14.99, pp192, illus, index. ISBN 0–7134–8277–X

Ingrid Pitt is a cult horror film actress whose credits include such classics as Hammer Studios' *The Vampire Lovers* (1970) and British Lion's *The Wicker Man* (1973).

In a short chapter she tells how she had the choice of getting into horror or pornographic films. She preferred the horror option, but her first regular work came from Spaghetti Westerns and as a Spanish TV presenter. Her break into horror came with a role in Willy Wilder's *The Omegans*, which was about phosphorous other-dimensional monsters.

The big time came with a part in *Where Eagles Dare* (1968) which led to her more memorable parts in Hammer and Amicus horror productions in the 1970s. When their popularity waned Pitt's career became equally rocky.

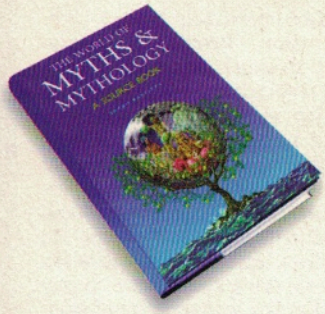
After these preliminaries Pitt takes us on a grand tour of vampire myths from around the world, famous vampires, writers and tales, vampires in the movies, and her selection of the most important and influential vampire movies. Her coverage of the subject is thorough and witty. Some readers might find the wit inappropriate for such a bloodthirsty subject, and it certainly can grind you down with its relentless levity.

The origins and history of the vampire myth are already available in many other books, and it would have been better if Pitt had given us more insights into her career and vampire movies.

On the plus side, it is obvious that Pitt is a student of vampirism and is not just using her horror film status to cash in on the subject. The book has plenty of illustrations and is a comprehensive guide to the vampire phenomenon.

Most vampire lovers will certainly want this at their bedside.

NIGEL WATSON



THE WORLD OF MYTHS AND MYTHOLOGY

SARAH BARTLETT

Blandford, London. 1998, hb £20.00, pp320, index, bib, illus. ISBN 0–7137–2673–3

In this meticulous publication, Bartlett offers an overview to the mythology of ancient civilisations and examines the basic questions that have founded these tales.

Quests, heroics, love, sex and death all find a place here and range from the rampant Enki of Mesopotamian lore – who creates the world by screwing anything in sight (including spiders) – to the less obscure European and Greek tales that should all be familiar. The progressive chapters deal with such issues as creation and the origin of celestial bodies. They include a bestiary, but it is the section on trickster spirits and their ambiguous behaviour that should be of most interest to the fortean.

All in all a worthy and well-referenced book.

JONATHAN BRYANT

PURPLE SECRET: GENES, 'MADNESS' AND THE ROYAL HOUSES OF EUROPE

JOHN C GRÖHL, MARTIN WARREN AND DAVID HUNT

Bantam Press. 1998, hb £16.99, pp297, illus, index, bib, notes. ISBN 0–5930–4148–8

Many people will have seen Alan Bennett's 1995 play *The Madness of King George III* or the film based upon it (the numeral being omitted for fear the Americans audience believed it to be a sequel). In it the king's madness was attributed to the hereditary disease of porphyria, Bennett basing this conclusion on pioneering work by the mother-son team of Hunter and Macalpine. (One of the other symptoms is discoloured urine – usually to a dark red but often to purple, hence the book's title.) As a result of the play, the diagnosis has been accepted by the general public as fact although debate still rages fiercely in academic circles.

Röhl, a noted historian, and Warren and Hunt, a pair of molecular geneticists, took Hunter and Macalpine's groundbreaking work on the illness of George III and his descendents and tried to establish a line of inheritance to modern times. The results are chronicled in this fascinating and entertaining book which traces their search through the tortuously tangled family trees of Europe's ruling houses.

Using tools as diverse as diaries and letters to the extraction of DNA from the bones of Queen Victoria's granddaughter and great-granddaughter, this unique collaboration demonstrates how the legacy continues even to the present generation of the Royal family.

Having proved that the disease was inherited from James I by George III and then by his granddaughter Victoria, the authors were able to show that "the family disease" passed from her into both the British and German lines of succession.

Unexpectedly, they also discovered that it had remained in the family until as recently as 1968 when Prince William of Gloucester, the Queen's cousin and seventh in line to the throne, was diagnosed as suffering from porphyria at the age of 24. He was killed when his plane crashed at an air show in 1972.

The bulk of the book is taken up with establishing the considerable historical research undertaken with two smaller sections on the DNA and molecular aspects of the disease and the search. All are written with commendable clarity, particularly the more complicated scientific analyses.

Highly readable – historical detective work doesn't come more interesting than this!

JANE WATKINS

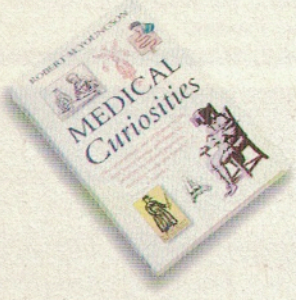
ARCTIC IRELAND: THE EXTRAORDINARY STORY OF THE GREAT FROST AND FORGOTTEN FAMINE OF 1740–41

DAVID DICKSON

The White Row Press Ltd, 135 Cumberland Rd, Dundonald, Belfast BT16 0BB. 1998, pb £4.95, pp94, illus, notes, index. ISBN 1–8701–3285–8

Arctic Ireland is about the Great Frost of 1740 and the *bliain an áir* (year of slaughter) of 1741. The Great Frost was followed by drought, flooding and another brutal winter. Up to half the population died of starvation and disease in less than two years. In relative terms it was more devastating than the Great Famine of the 1840s. This is an exemplary study of an unknown period of Irish history – well researched and written, and beautifully illustrated.

VAL STEVENSON



MEDICAL CURIOSITIES

ROBERT M YOUNGSON

Robinson. 1997, pb £6.99, pp371, bib. ISBN 1–8548–7902–2

This is an excellent miscellany of medical forteana, mostly gleaned from "reputable medical journals" – just like *FT*'s regular 'Medical Bag'.

There are impressive accounts of the human body's amazing tendency to turn all unwanted matter into stone, like an oyster but on a much larger scale. You can read about a traumatised eyeball turning into chalk or a calcified something (perhaps a fatty tumour) inside the pelvis of a Bavarian soldier who died in 1760 – and even calcified fæces. And what about the 10in (25cm) , 14oz (435g) bladder stone which worked its way through a small wound before crashing to the floor?

Or perhaps you would like to know of the deranged professor of surgery in Berlin who, forced into retirement by colleagues, carried on 'operating' using only local anaesthetic in his own kitchen, less than 50 year ago!

Should you suffer from urinary problems don't, like a certain Scottish shepherd, have a go yourself. He tried to dilate his uretheral stricture with a handy dead viper and forgot that its scales all run in one direction. It worked its way up and into the bladder, requiring surgical extraction.

Likewise, pushing a dried bean up your urethra in an attempt to cure incontinence can give a whole new meaning to the phrase "a growth in the bladder."

This book records much, much more: foreign bodies in the brain discharged through the nose; inept suicide attempts by nail-gun and car exhausts depleted of their lethal carbon monoxide by catalytic converters; wolf children; and death caused by such creatures as the domestic cat and jellyfish.

Not all the tales are fortean, but all are fascinating nevertheless.

NICK WARREN

MULTIMEDIA

MOVIE

CUBE

Dir: Vincenzo Natali. Stars: Maurice Dean Wint, Nicole de Boer, Nicky Guadagni. 90mins, Cert 15.

Try to imagine waking up to find youself trapped in a huge and potentially lethal Rubik's Cube, where one wrong move could leave you dead in any number of cruel and inventive ways. That's the premise of this unusual and effective low budget Canadian sci-fi thriller that's been shaking up film festival audiences the world over.

Despite having only one set and five characters to play with, first time director Vincenzo Natali manages to sustain a constant level of tension throughout. As the pressure mounts, the would be escapees' masks drop and their true faces are exposed in a series of unexpected twists that should satisfy even the most jaded viewers. If things do become a little simplistic towards the end, it's a small price to pay for what is a welcome relief from the rest of the summer's dreary, overblown blockbusters.

MARK PILKINGTON

VIDEO

CROPPIES

Grant Wakefield's documentary is a sympathetic, balanced and engaging portrait of the insular world of the crop circle enthusiasts, or 'croppies'. Consisting primarily of interviews taped in and around the Barge Inn (see page 24), the craftily edited film lets the croppies speak out for themselves.

Croppies has yet to be picked up for UK distribution but copies are available directly from Grant Wakefield, 1 Church Walk, Stanton St Bernard, Wiltshire SN8 4LL (Tel: 01672 851888). All profits will go towards relief agencies working in Iraq and the Sudan.

MARK PILKINGTON

GAME

THE X-FILES GAME

Developer: Hyperbole. Publisher: Fox Interactive. Price: £44.99 ($49.99). Rated: 13+. Format: Windows 95/Macintosh.

There may be a few forms of media (Kabuki? talking drums?) that Chris Carter and his *The X-Files* have not conquered, but they will be dealt with in time. For now, Scully, Mulder, and those nutty conspirators have rolled their troops forward into the interactive realm, with results that are curiously unrewarding for both seasoned gamers and X-Philes with little interest in computer entertainment.

It's always a fair bet going into any media-related game that you're going to get plenty of media and little game; *The X-Files* is no exception. The plot is centred on your character (agent Craig Willmore) who is assigned to find Mulder and Scully after they go missing. He does this by fumbling around his office, clicking on everything in sight in order to trigger video clips and clicking through dialogue trees until conversations are over. In conversations, he can also choose an 'attitude' that may or may not effect the outcome of the scene.

This would lead you to believe that the storyline branches, as the box claims. It's actually quite linear, with few true branches. There are very few puzzles and those few are patently illogical. The first puzzle one encounters involves learning Willmore's computer password by searching his office. But you are Willmore. Do you do this every morning? Are you an idiot? Do the FBI know this?

Willmore is as dry as zwieback, and long portions of the game involve his boring personal life and flaccid attempts at romance, neither of which fit the tone of the show. He is also completely in the dark about things that are immediately obvious to the gamer (who, we can assume, actually watches the show). For a good two-thirds of the game he patters along investigating dark dealings without a clue that it's all standard alien conspiracy fare. There are seven disks of video and gaming in *The X-Files Game* and for about six of them the gamer is always two steps ahead of his character.

The video sequences are some of the best-looking yet seen in a game. When Mulder and Scully finally make their appearance, things actually get a little more interesting. This demonstrates that two good actors in familiar roles can galvanise bland proceedings more than it does any skill on the part of the game designers.

The plot is a tired retread of sub-plots that are better executed in the show, and the thin element of interactivity has added little to the cost of the experience. Unless you need the 30 minutes of new Mulder/Scully video to complete a collection, give it a pass.

TOM LIAM MCDONALD

See page 66 for an interview with the game's executive producer, Paul Provenzano, and a chance to win copies of the game.

COMPETITION

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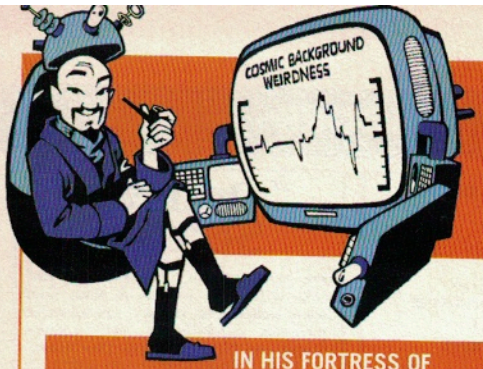
THE WINNER WILL RECEIVE A SONY PLAYSTATION AND A COPY OF THE GAME, *WILD 9*, WHILE FOUR RUNNERS-UP WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF *WILD 9*



THE HIEROPHANT

IN HIS FORTRESS OF ARROGANCE, DEEP BELOW THE HIMALAYAS, THE IMMORTAL ASCENDED MASTER KNOWN AS THE HIEROPHANT TRAVELS THE MORE DISREPUTABLE PATHS OF FORTEANA

X-Files fandom is currently getting a killer alien bee in its bonnet over the on-screen kiss between Mulder and Scully in the forthcoming film. Getting slightly less air-time, strangely, is its real-life counterpart. "Britain's Answer to Fox Mulder" (an epithet which leads the Hierophant to wonder if the right questions are being asked), Nick Pope, is reportedly stepping out with *FT* contributor, shroudie and pyramid buff Lynn Picknett. Nick, with characteristic reticence, "refuses to confirm" mutterings of impending nuptials. It's hard to shake the feeling that it would somehow be more right had he paired off with Susan Blackmore.

As forteans, we are of course used to the occasional disappointment; the Hierophant has lately been feeling deeply let down by London's theatre promoters. My heart leapt when I first saw posters for Wayne Sleep's new show, *Dash!* Here, at last, was due recognition for one of the UK's most original fortean thinkers, cryptozoologist and *Fortean Times* publisher Mike Dash. Sadly, it turns out to be some sort of excuse for a lot of silly prancing around, by way of celebrating Mr Sleep's career. One can but hope.

It would be news indeed if a UFO conference ever managed to pass without some sort of argy-bargy between rival factions. Hardly surprising, then, to hear that tempers flared on more than one occasion at July's *Quest/British UFO Magazine* conference. Whether between unhappy speaker – irked, the Hierophant understands, by what she felt was an insufficiently opulently-appointed hotel room – and organiser, or between sceptic and believer, arguments seemed the order of the day. Word has it that the apparently omnipresent Rob Irving indulged in vigorous pointing of fingers and accusations of out-and-out lying at one stage – which, some might feel, is a little cheeky given that Rob is not averse to the occasional bit of well-placed fakery himself.

Cattle mutilation researcher Lynda Moulton-Howe won the hearts of many UK forteans by metaphorically holding TV reporter Louis Theroux's hand while he visited his first "mute" as part of his *Weird Weekends* series. Her stoicism compared most impressively with Theroux's retching and cries of "Oh Christ, its rectum's bubbling". However, such detachment may be affecting her concentration. The index of her latest mammoth tome, *Glimpses of Other Realities Volume II: High Strangeness* – so vast that the Hierophant lost a couple of bookshelves to a gravitational collapse after adding it to his archive – contains a great many page references under "UFO"; the word appears throughout the text. The accompanying publicity dossier, however, has Ms Howe telling one newspaper interviewer "I never use the word 'UFO'... It has too many negative connotations". Perhaps this is a usage of "never" unique to Ms Howe.

There really ought to be a term for those of us who, like the Hierophant, make a study of ufologists and ufology; meta-ufologists, perhaps? Whatever we eventually choose to call ourselves, many of us have been keeping a close eye on the antics of Commander X for some years. The Commander – never explicitly identified, although almost all of his books appear to have introductions by Timothy "Mr UFO" Beckley – has regularly set the most shocking revelations about UFOs, conspiracies of one sort or another, and other naughy cover ups before his avid public. His latest suggests that things are getting a little thin chez X; having dealt so comprehensively with UFOs, the good Commander has now produced *Secrets of Invisibility and Levitation*, a practical guide for the absolute novice. To save my readers having to fork out to learn this vital and useful ability, I shall now reveal the final secret of invisibility: concentrate, like, really hard. Lots. Please don't abuse this awesome power.

Shirley MacLaine Watch: It appears that Ms MacLaine's efforts to usher in world peace by 2000 (*FT* passim) are still going unreported by a press overly concerned with worldly matters. Sixteen months and counting!

IF YOU HAVE A LEAD ON ANY PARANORMAL GOSSIP, SHARE IT WITH THE HIEROPHANT
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PHIL BOND

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ISSUE 116 ON SALE 10 OCTOBER 1998

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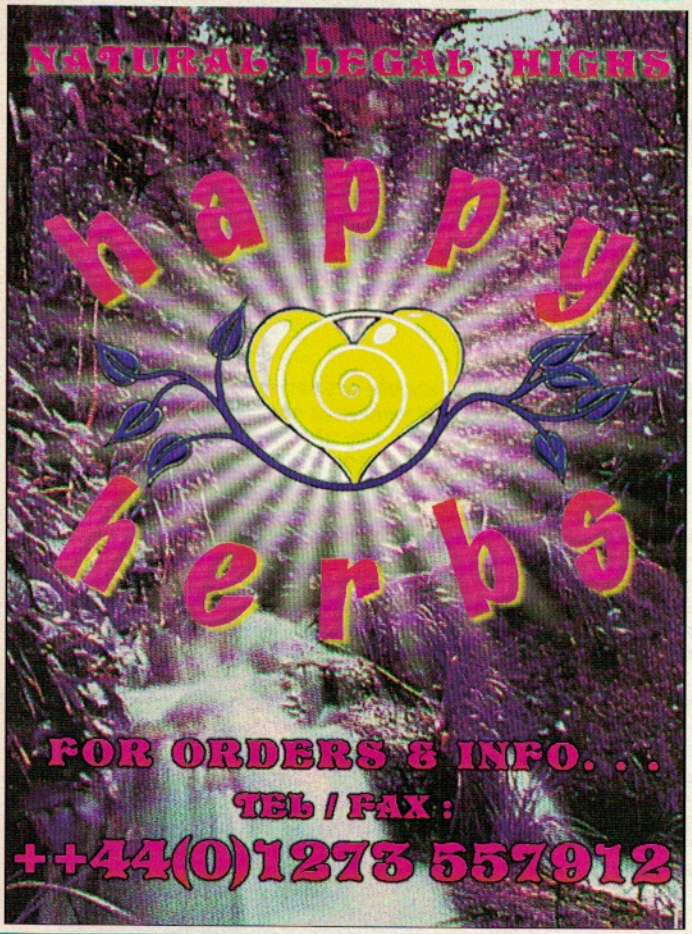

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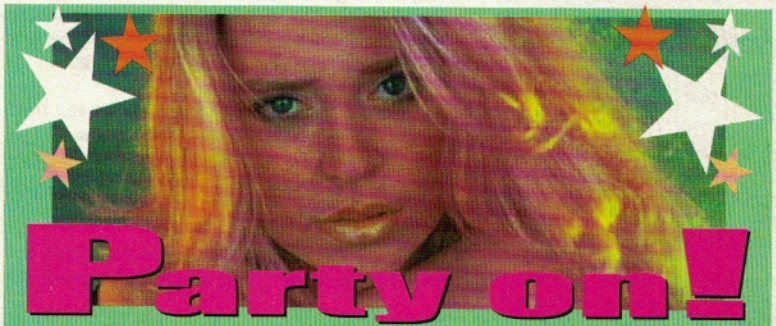
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PAUL PROVENZANO

This summer sees the release of not only *The X-Files* movie but also a computer game based on the show. The Executive Producer, **Paul Provenzano**, vice president of production and development at Fox Interactive, talks to **Bob Rickard**.

The TXF game was an inevitable development of the TV series. How difficult was it to create the 'look and feel' of an FBI investigation?

We actually had a number of good reference sources for the correct investigation techniques. In addition to the input from series writer/producer Frank Spotnitz, our developer, HyperBole Studios, had an occasion to call in the local FBI. When the agent they were dealing with found out they were working with Fox on the game, he offered tons of advice and even copies of official forms (blank of course!) that gave the game the extra touch of realism.

In addition to the real FBI input, we also consulted with the show's executive producer and sometime director R W Goodwin, reviewed all the storyboards and discussed how the show would have covered each event in the game.

To add further 'atmosphere', all the props and costumes are from the show.

The game contains many objects and images that tip the hat to events or stories in the TV series: a 'Heuvelmans lake' mug, Jose Chung's book, a leaflet for Sophie the gorilla, an 'alien autopsy' joke and so on. Where does the game's 'story' fit into the main story arc?

The story in the game neatly fits in between the time series three ends and series four starts. The game actually has its own series production number. This timeframe allows us to include really great characters like 'X'.

How has the main TXF crew reacted to the game? Have any of them played it?

The main TFX crew loves the game. We have gotten some really great comments back. Gillian loves the game; she has said it looks better than some of the episodes!

Early on Chris Carter told us that if the game was not great, he would be forced to distance himself from it. That has not happened.

The visual presentation of the game is impressive. In fact, I've not seen such blatant product placement since Kubrick's *2001*. Was this deliberate?

The visual presentation was created by Director of Photography Jon Joffen's three years of photographing the show and game designer/director Greg Roach at Hyperbole Studios.

We didn't approach it as product placement. Decisions were made as to what was the logical computer, phone, TV, etc that these characters would use and then we asked each of the manufacturers for permission. Some said no, some yes; some even gave us a model in development.

Considerable research into ufology evidently went into creating the story details. Did any of this change your own attitude towards the notion of UFOs, aliens and secret governments?

I walked away from all of this with the idea that there are definitely some extreme nuts out there and yet some real questions that have not been answered or explained. I think the extremists tend to obscure the actual search for answers because it is just too easy to dismiss them.

The in-game documents make good use of existing organisations like CUFOS, MUFON and even CSICOP. Bearing in mind Chris Carter's lukewarm reception by the Skeptics last year, just how much co-operation did you get from these outfits?

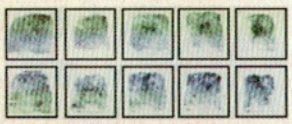
The writers used tons of reference from all over the place. I am not aware of any direct involvement or participation from any of those organisations.

Some reviews have been critical of the actual gameplay. Is there anything you'd do differently if there were to be a sequel?

My observation has been we have gotten the most criticism from people who have not actually played the game. The typical negative response has centred on the idea that they don't like "those kind of games".

I don't understand what group they are comparing us to. I don't know of a game that has combined all the elements we have – international stars at their peak, writers of the highest calibre, amazing photography of a quality that has never been seen in a game combined with a great game engine. We seem to be lumped in with a bunch of games with bad acting, bad writing, bad blue-screen with a simplistic game interface.

We have created a classic adventure game that would be challenging and fun if it were live action, rendered or real time computer graphics. People are telling us they love the game and they are playing it two, three times in a row. I have to believe we made the right game for the right reasons.



Field Notes

Marital Status: Single
Graduate of Oxford University; AB in Psychology, 1982. Graduat of FBI Training Academy Quantico, Virgina, 1984.

COMPETITION 62

QUESTION

What is the name of José Chung's 'fictional' account of the X-Files?

There are copies of THE X-FILES GAME for the first five correct entries to reach us at the competition address printed on page 47 by 31 OCTOBER 1998.